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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF THE UNITY TASK FORCE ON THE UNITY OF THE WEST OHIO CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

Alice Marie Wolfe

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church by conducting focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet, by surveying the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and by interviewing the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference.

When believers experience soteriological unity with Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit, they should exhibit behavior consistent with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), as well as kinship and *koinonia* described in the Old and New Testaments. The unity of believers in the Bible provides a description for what functional unity should look like among believers in all eras, as well as the missional unity that results in the body of Christ reaching out to the world. Thus, by describing the signs of soteriological, functional, and missional unity in a body of believers, one should be able to determine a relative level of overall unity they experience.

This research showed that the Unity Task Force caused little, if any, significant increase in the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference. Significant events both positively and negatively impacted the sense of unity in the conference, and building relationships with God and each other is the key to maintaining and building unity.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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OF THE WEST OHIO CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

presented by

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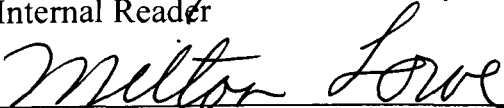
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THE IMPACT OF THE UNITY TASK FORCE ON THE UNITY
OF THE WEST OHIO CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Ministry

by

Alice Marie Wolfe

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Alice Marie Wolfe

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

Theological division hinders the unity and harms the mission of the Christian church. For decades, the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church (and the United Methodist Church as a whole) has experienced theological division. Many years ago, the theological battle lines were drawn between *conservatives* (or *evangelicals*) and *liberals* (or *progressives*). Both *sides* believe they are living out the gospel the way Jesus would want them. However, they have very different fundamental beliefs in Christology, understanding the origin and revelation of Scripture through the Holy Spirit, and understanding how they should live out their calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ (“Homosexuality and Church Unity”). As a result, a great theological divide has formed.

In response to the intense division at the 2004 United Methodist General Conference, the general conference passed what became known as the “unity resolution”: “As United Methodists we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for our common mission of making disciples throughout the world” (Caldwell). The 2004 General Conference also adopted the “Report of the Task Force on Homosexuality and the Unity of the Church” (see Appendix A), which calls for additional dialogue throughout the denomination that will hopefully “lead to greater understanding, love, and care for each other” as well as greater civility to all (“Report of the Task Force,” 150).

In response to the 2004 unity resolution, the West Ohio Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns drafted a “Resolution on Christian Unity” (see

Appendix B), and then the West Ohio Annual Conference approved it during their annual conference session in June 2004. To help the West Ohio Conference build bridges over the theological differences and live out this mandate, resident Bishop Bruce Ough formed the Unity Task Force to “identify and implement concrete ways to remove the barriers, primarily theological and cultural barriers” that divide West Ohio (“Who Was I”). The small group of theologically diverse clergy and laity from the West Ohio Conference spent time getting to know each other as persons, not just as theological labels, talking with each other openly and honestly about the issues and struggles and working to facilitate dialogue throughout the annual conference to build unity. I was a part of this Unity Task Force from 2005 to 2012.

The Unity Task Force worked to foster dialogue within the group and throughout the West Ohio Annual Conference by hosting dialogue sessions and educational workshops (see Appendix C). The Unity Task Force also worked to improve the climate of annual conference sessions around theological divisions by (1) teaching people the principles of agreeing and disagreeing in love (Ough, “Dissertation”; see Appendix D), (2) encouraging the conference to use guidelines for civility and holy conferencing (see Appendix E), and (3) proposing legislation to change the procedures for elections of delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences that had become so divisive and rancorous (see Appendix F).

From the beginning, the Unity Task Force wrestled to understand fully the unity to which God calls the church. At the beginning, some dared to dream the conference could achieve perfect unity. When organic unity did not happen (due to the deep theological differences), some gave up their dream and settled for trying to create a civil

atmosphere in the annual conference. However, Christians do not have a choice to settle for civility (mere politeness or courtesy) when Christ clearly calls them to unity. While Christ's call may be clear, people's understanding of unity is not. For Christians to live out the unity to which God calls them, they must first understand the biblical meaning of unity. Unity is vital to the Christian church because, as Jesus prayed in John 17:21-23, the mission (that the world would know and believe in Jesus Christ) depends on the unity (the oneness) of Christians with Christ and each other: "Unity fuels ... ministries with greater energy and zeal; disunity puts them at risk and draws away vital resources, commitment, and dynamism" ("In Search of Unity"), thus harming the mission of the church.

The Apostle Paul instructed the church to make every effort to maintain the unity they have in the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) and to keep building up the body of Christ until "all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13, NIV). Since no one has achieved complete maturity in Christ, let alone the whole church, much work needs to be done. The church cannot settle for civility if it is to remain faithful to Christ's call for unity.

However, little, if any, research has been done to measure the impact of conference efforts to build unity in the United Methodist Church (or any other denomination). Therefore, research is needed to help the church know what practices have been tried and whether they positively impacted the unity of the church. Ultimately, the principles of the lessons learned can be applied to all churches, conferences, and

denominations as they strive to live into the unity to which Christ has called them. For the Church to be what Christ prayed for it to be, it must keep striving for unity.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church by conducting focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet, by surveying the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and by interviewing the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference.

Research Questions

Four key questions guided this research.

Research Question #1

How did members of the Unity Task Force view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Research Question #2

How did members of the Conference Extended Cabinet view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Research Question #3

How did the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Research Question #4

How did significant events impact the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Definition of Terms

Key terms in this study are defined as follows.

Unity Task Force

The West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force included a group of lay and clergy with different theological perspectives whom the resident bishop invited to participate in regular, face-to-face dialogue with each other and with the resident bishop to try to build unity within the West Ohio Conference. For the purpose of this study, I did not include the bishop in the interview of the Unity Task Force.

Extended Cabinet

The West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet includes the resident bishop, eight district superintendents, assistant to the bishop, Director of Finance and Administration/Treasurer, Director of Office of Ministry, Director of Council on Development, and Director of Connectional and Missional Church Initiatives. For the purpose of this study, I did not include the bishop in the interview of the Extended Cabinet.

Unity

Jesus Christ calls his disciples to be unified, to be *one* with him and with each other. This unity can be expressed in three ways.

Soteriological unity. Persons experience spiritual or soteriological unity with Christ when they become one with Christ. Thus, they should become more like Christ and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Functional unity. When persons become one with Christ, they also become one with the body of Christ (fellow believers and followers of Christ) and experience a practical or functional unity as they relate to each other and use their diverse gifts to build up the body of Christ and each other. Though imperfect, their oneness with each other should result in loving, Christlike behavior toward other believers.

Missional unity. When believers become one with Christ and each other within the body of Christ, they become united in mission to reach those outside the body of Christ.

Ministry Study

I used a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church by conducting focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet by surveying the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and by interviewing the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference.

Context

Theological division has plagued the Christian church from its very beginning, but that division should not stop the church from trying to live into the unity to which Christ calls it. Throughout the centuries, division in the church (whether in small local churches or large worldwide denominations) has hindered the mission of the church.

When Christians argue and fight with each other within the church, they hinder the mission because people outside the church do not want to be part of that division nor the God the Christians supposedly worship.

The Methodist Church, in general, has experienced many divisions and splits throughout its history for varying reasons. In recent decades, the United Methodist Church has experienced deep theological division, particularly around the issue of homosexuality—whether homosexuality is a sin and then, accordingly, whether homosexual persons are permitted to be clergy. People within the church, regardless of their theological understanding, have experienced great pain because of the division. While many would like the division to end, no one seems to have specific methods that help the church find unity.

For the past few decades, the West Ohio Conference has exemplified the theological division of the United Methodist Church (especially at the 2004 General Conference), so much so that it gained a reputation for its division across the jurisdiction and, perhaps, the nation. However, at the 2008 general conference, a delegate from another conference sat behind the West Ohio delegation and observed that while the delegates voted differently on many petitions, they treated each other with respect and helped one another. The delegate told West Ohio's Bishop Ough, "It is obvious your delegation doesn't agree on everything, but it is also evident that they have a strong sense of community and respect for one another" ("Dissertation"). The atmosphere within the delegation had radically changed between 2004 and 2008. This research determined how much impact, if any, the Unity Task Force had on the unity of the West Ohio Conference.

The West Ohio Conference includes fifty-eight (of the eighty-eight) counties in Ohio, 1,098 churches, and 193,258 members as of 31 December 2011. The conference includes rural, suburban, and urban areas in the Midwest region of the United States. The conference has four large metropolitan areas, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Toledo, several smaller metropolitan areas, and seventeen Appalachian counties.

Methodology

To assess the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, I used an exploratory, mixed-methods research design. I conducted semi-structured focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet and then surveyed the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. The themes and statements raised from the qualitative data of the focus group interviews provided information to create a questionnaire that would gather quantitative data from the West Ohio Conference delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. I also used a researcher-designed, field research journal during Unity Task Force meetings and conference events and activities. After gathering the other data, I interviewed the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference to get his input and assessment of the data gathered.

Participants

Participants in the research study included four groups of persons from the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. First, the total population of members of the Unity Task Force in 2011-2012 included fifteen clergy and laypersons of the West

Ohio Conference representing gender, theological, and ethnic diversity. Second, the total population of the 2011-2012 West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet included eight district superintendents, the assistant to the bishop, and four directors of ministries of the West Ohio Conference. Third, the total population of the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences included sixty-four persons in 2008 and fifty-six persons in 2012, with a diversity of ages, races, and theological perspectives. After removing from the pool of delegates and alternates the persons who died or are no longer members of the West Ohio Conference, my mentor and myself, and the duplicated names, I surveyed the remaining eighty-four delegates and alternates. I did not include the resident bishop in the focus group interviews with the Unity Task Force or Extended Cabinet so as not to allow his presence to influence the members' open and honest sharing. Fourth, I conducted a one-on-one interview with the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference after all the other data was collected to get his input and assessment of the gathered data.

Instrumentation

I used a researcher-designed, semi-structured focus group interview for members of the Unity Task Force and the Extended Cabinet (see Appendix I). Themes and statements raised from the qualitative data of the focus group interviews provided the information needed for the development of a questionnaire to gather quantitative data from the West Ohio Conference delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale (with an optional *Do not know* response) to evaluate the impact the Unity Task Force had on the unity of the West Ohio Conference, as perceived by the West Ohio Conference delegates

and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences (see Appendix H). Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide additional feedback to give insight into the underlying issues and general atmosphere of the annual conference. A researcher-designed, field-researcher journal included observations at various Unity Task Force and annual conference meetings and events. Finally, a personal interview with the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference provided his insights and observations of the other data collected (see Appendix K).

Variables

To try to eliminate various intervening variables of the qualitative portion of the mixed-designs study, I used consistent procedures throughout the study. The quantitative portion of the study evaluated the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. To account for various intervening variables, participants recorded basic demographic information (e.g., age, gender, theological perspective, and years participated in the West Ohio annual conference) in the survey.

Data Collection

After contacting the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference to obtain permission to pursue this research, I used a researcher-designed, semi-structured focus group to interview members of the Unity Task Force and the Extended Cabinet (see Appendix I). The themes and insights raised from these interviews provided the basis for developing a questionnaire to gather quantitative data from the West Ohio Conference delegates and alternates to 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences (see Appendix H). After designing and testing the questionnaire, I e-mailed to each of the potential participants information about the study, an invitation to participate, and the

Web link where the participants could complete the online questionnaire. The use of an online survey allowed the participants to maintain anonymity. Open-ended questions on the questionnaire allowed participants to give additional feedback to provide insight into the underlying issues and general atmosphere of annual conference. I used a researcher-designed, field-researcher journal to record observations at various Unity Task Force and annual conference meetings and events. After gathering the other data, I conducted a semi-structured interview of the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference to get his input and assessment of the data gathered (see Appendix K).

Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the researcher-designed, semi-structured focus group interviews, I read and summarized the comments and made a chart to determine themes that emerged and insights gained and then to prepare the questionnaire.

Descriptive and simple statistics enabled me to evaluate the results of the quantitative data of the questionnaire. For the questions using the Likert scale, I calculated and compared the mean score for each question, the grand mean for all subjects for each question, and the final mean score for all questions of the instrument. Further data processing also included *t*-tests and analyses of variance.

To analyze the data from the open-ended question on the questionnaire, I read and summarized all the responses and made a chart to determine themes that emerged. The themes were then correlated to the responses from the survey.

To analyze the data from the researcher-designed, field-researcher journal of observations at various Unity Task Force and conference meetings and events, I read and summarized observations to determine themes that emerged. That information was then

correlated to the responses from the questionnaire, the open-ended questions on the questionnaire, and the researcher-designed, semi-structured focus groups.

Using the other data gathered, I designed a semi-structured interview for the resident bishop (see Appendix K), analyzed the data from that interview, and read and summarized all the responses to determine themes that emerged. That information was then correlated to all the other data.

Generalizability

This study was limited to the perceived unity of the West Ohio Conference of the four participant groups: members of the Unity Task Force, members of the West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet, the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and the resident bishop. Therefore, the study did not address any impact the Unity Task Force may have had on the general population of membership or in local churches within the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. If the efforts of the Unity Task Force influenced members of the participant groups, they may have applied what they learned in their local settings. However, if members of the general population of membership had no contact with the Unity Task Force or its work, the Unity Task Force likely had no influence on the local church setting.

Churches and conferences of all denominations may apply the principles learned from this study about how Christians can work together to build unity. Not only will this study help to fill the literature gap in this field, but the principles learned may also help conferences and denominations know how to adjust policies and practices that will enable them to maintain and build up the unity to which Christ calls them. If the churches,

conferences, and denominations apply these principles and grow in unity, then the world will see the difference and be drawn to the Christ who enables it, thus fulfilling Christ's prayer for Christians to be one so that the world may know and become one with him.

Theological Foundation

In John 17, Jesus repeatedly prayed that his disciples and those who would become his disciples “might become one” (be unified). He clarified the statement by praying to the Father, “that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me” (John 17:23). If people can understand how Jesus and the Father are *one*, and how Jesus is *one* in them, then they can understand how they are to be *one* with each other.

Unity of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

To understand how Jesus and the Father are one, people must turn to one of the foundational understandings of the Old Testament—the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4). Shema literally means *Hear*—the first word in the verse. When asked by a teacher of the law which is the most important of all commandments, Jesus quoted the Shema (Mark 12:29). As the central confession or creed of their faith, Jewish people recited the Shema at least twice daily (as instructed in Deut. 6:7) and were taught “to have the name of God on their lips from early childhood to the moment of death” (Wilson 123-24). Jewish interpreters have generally interpreted the phrase “the LORD is one” as a declaration of the uniqueness of God or an affirmation of the monotheism of God (124-25). The Holy Scriptures seem to indicate both interpretations are correct: (1) God is unique; no other God exists (Deut. 4:35; Isa. 45:5, 14), and (2) God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is one (Gen. 1:26; Matt. 28:19; John 10:30-33).

At the heart of the Trinity is a loving relationship among three persons—three persons who have the same essence or nature and mission. In Scripture, a person’s name represents who that person is at the core of his or her being— his or her very essence or nature. For example, God changed people’s names when their nature changed. Abram (“exalted ancestor”) became Abraham (“father of many nations”), and Jacob (“deceiver” or “heel-grabber”) became Israel (“one who wrestles with God”). In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, “baptizing them in the *name* [emphasis mine] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus did not say, “in the *names* of.” Thus, Jesus implied that all three persons of the Trinity are one and the same because they have the same name and nature. If each person in the Trinity has the same nature, then each shares the same attributes of that same nature with the others. Therefore, each person of the Trinity is love (1 John 4:16); the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); just, upright, and without deceit (Deut. 32:4); holy (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8); good and whose love endures forever (Ps. 100:5); and, ready to forgive, gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Neh. 9:17). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share oneness but not sameness; each has his own identity (Seamands 12, 14). Each person of the Trinity has a distinct role (1 Pet. 1:2) in fulfilling their common mission—to restore (reconcile) all persons into loving union with God (Col. 1:19-20).

The unity of God is the foundation of the Trinity and the goal of uniting all persons with the Trinity (Moltmann 61-62): “The life of God within the Trinity cannot be conceived of as a closed circle—the symbol of perfection and self-sufficiency” (56). Rather, the Trinity is seen as an open circle, as illustrated in Andrei Rublev’s *Icon of the Holy Trinity*, and invites all persons to join them (Seamands 12, 15).

Unity of Humans with God

God wants all persons to become one with him. Jesus explained, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). Believers can be confident of this union of Christ living in them:

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. (1 John 4:13-15)

Paul understands this union with Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith [of] the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).¹ Paul did not lose his personal identity; Paul still existed. However, with Christ living in him, he became more fully and truly the Paul God created him to be (Seamands 147). By being united with Christ, humans participate in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). They do not become divine, but the Spirit living in them helps them become more like the divine so they begin to share in and embody the characteristics of the divine nature (Gal. 5:22-23). This process is also known sanctification for which Jesus prayed in John 17:17.

Human union with Christ is organic (a living union) in that humans are like a branch connected to the vine (Christ). They cannot survive or produce anything on their own (John 15:4-5). Likewise, when humans, as branches, are connected to the one vine (Christ), they are ultimately connected to each other. Human union with Christ is spiritual—the Holy Spirit (Christ’s spirit) connecting with their spirit (John 14:16-20; 1 John 3:24, 4:13). Human union with Christ is also a mystery:

¹ Most translations say “by faith *in* the Son of God” (NRSV, NIV, ESV, NLT, KJV), but the more accurate translation is “by the faith *of* the Son of God” (YLT; Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012).

The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:26-27)

In the same way God living in humans is a mystery, so, too, God's joining humans together is a mystery to make them one with each other (as human believers) in Christ to be the body of Christ in the world.

Unity of Humans (Believers) with Each Other

As previously mentioned, Jesus prayed that humans will be one with each other in the same way the Father and Son are one (John 17:21-23). The prerequisite for being one with each other is being one with Christ. Christ wants humans to be one with each other as parts of a body are one: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:4-5). Christ is not only the source of oneness among humans but also the head of that oneness in the body (Eph. 1:10; 4:15; Col. 2:10). As a body, humans, like the Trinity, experience oneness but not sameness: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Like the persons of the Trinity, humans have distinct roles in carrying out the mission but are made one by the same Spirit, Lord, and God working in all of them.

When humans are one in Christ and one with each other with Christ as the head, all the parts of the body function as one. Each part is needed, and all the parts need each other (1 Cor. 12:14-26). God purposely made the parts different with different functions so all the specific functions of the body might be accomplished. God brought them

together the way he wants so no division should exist in the body. One part does not believe it is better or more important than the others, and all have equal concern for each other. Contrary to the individualized and privatized views of Western culture, no one can be fully united with Christ and not be in communion with others. As parts of one body, believers belong to each other and need each other to survive (Rom. 12:5).

In speaking of unity of believers in Ephesians 4, Paul seems to work with two different understandings of *unity*. In verse three, Paul instructs believers to maintain the “unity of the Spirit,” that which they have already attained through their one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:5-6). They already have unity as the body of believers because the one Spirit lives in them, unites them with each other under one Head, Christ, and gives them (the body) true oneness, although it will not be fully realized and fully visible until Christ returns (Barton et al., *Ephesians* 76-77). However, “[t]hat invisible unity which binds Christians together, whether they know it or not, is the foundation of all unity but is not enough” (Lawrence 10). Paul also calls believers to continue working to attain a level of unity described in 4:13. When Jesus prayed for all who *will* believe in him, he prayed for those who were not yet believers and, therefore, were not yet one with him and each other (John 17:20-23), and perhaps, he was also praying for the fullness of their unity, which is yet to come with the fullness of God’s kingdom.

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul calls believers to use their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ “*until* [emphasis mine] we all reach unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” The word *until* indicates that unity has not yet been achieved. Thus,

Paul calls for two different things: (1) the unity of the Spirit is to be *maintained* (4:3), and (2) the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God is to be *attained* (4:13; Barton et al., *Ephesians* 84).

The Importance of Unity to God's Mission

Jesus' prayer in John 17 clarifies why he wants Christians to be unified: (1) the world may believe God sent Christ (v. 21), and (2) the world will know the Father sent him and loved the world (John 3:16) as the Father loved Christ (v. 23). Thus, the purpose of Christians' unity with God and with each other is so that the world may believe and know the Father sent the Son and loves them, so they, too, may be reconciled to God and become one with God and each other—a oneness patterned after the oneness of the Trinity.

Unity and mission (and unity in mission) are part of the church's DNA or make-up because the church is born of God who is Trinitarian (united) and missional (Snyder and Runyon 49). In Christ, the church is one, not only for the members of the body but for the world. In Christ, the church should be witnessing to the world the all-embracing love of God, so they, too, may become one in and with Christ (Moltmann 339-40). Jesus' prayer for humans' unity in him and with others is linked to his previous command to "love one another" (John 13:34); both are for the purpose of their mission—"to let the world know" (13:35; Barton et al., *John* 344). Human unity in Christ allows them, like Christ, to strive to be in "unity and fellowship with the oppressed, humiliated and forsaken" (Moltmann 345). Thus, the imperative to unity and to mission are one and the same (Outler 17). As Francis Schaeffer says, "We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true and that Christianity is true, unless the

world sees some reality of oneness of true Christians” (qtd. in Barton et al., *Ephesians* 75). The church’s divisiveness or lack of unity hampers the mission (Oden 308). The world will have difficulty discovering and believing the truth if Christians argue about it and cannot agree on it themselves (Lawrence 25). The world is watching and waiting for Christians, the body of Christ, to model what they say (Snodgrass 173). Indeed, human unity in Christ is not only a gift but a great calling and challenge so that “the world may believe” (“In Search of Unity”).

Overview

Chapter 2 provides a more thorough study of the biblical understanding of unity and signs of unity in the church. Chapter 2 also includes a study of literature related to unity in the church and other research of similar conference or church interventions. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study. Chapter 5 documents the major findings and conclusion of the study, as well as practical applications of the findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Theological division hinders the unity and harms the mission of the Christian church (Moltmann 345-46; Oden 308; O'Connor 39; Mshanga 322; Baker 36; Clifford 337; Pohl 72-73). For decades, the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church as a whole has experienced theological division. Both the more liberal and the more conservative believe they are living out the gospel the way Jesus wants them. However, their very different fundamental beliefs in Christology, understanding the origin and revelation of Scripture through the Holy Spirit, and understanding how they should live out their calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ ("Homosexuality and Church Unity") have resulted in a great theological divide. While many strive for unity, many struggle to understand fully the unity to which God calls the church and how to attain it. Some believe that unity should be ecumenical (Baker 11); institutional or ideological (Burgess 271); with God/Christ, with other believers, or in the Eucharist (Mshanga 167); sacramental, ecclesial, apostolic succession, liturgical, doctrinal, historical, or political (Baker 13); of baptism, conversion, and confession of faith (13); or, practically and confessionally (348).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church by using an exploratory, mixed-methods research design. Data gathered and themes raised from focus group interviews of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet provided insight for the design of the questionnaire used to survey the West Ohio

Conference clergy and lay delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences.

Theological Framework—Biblical Understanding of Unity

Before evaluating the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity on the West Ohio Conference, one must first understand the biblical meaning of unity.

Unity of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

The unity for which Jesus prayed for his disciples (present and future) is based on the unity of the Trinity as found in the Shema (Deut. 6:4). Among the first to interpret the plural *we* in Genesis 1:26 as referring to members of the Trinity, Irenaeus and Theophilus established the norm that became a matter-of-fact understanding throughout much of church history (Grenz 284). However, in recent years, many have rejected this theory (285). Many argue “The theological battle of Moses’ day was not Trinitarianism versus Unitarianism. The battle centered around the belief in one God who is himself uncreated, merciful, and sovereign versus the belief in multiple gods...” (Hamilton 133). Other theories emerged as to the meaning of *we* in Genesis 1:26. First, some suggested it has no exegetical significance but is merely a remnant of the polytheism of myths from which the Genesis story evolved (Grenz 285). Second, some assert the author borrowed from what became the “standard Jewish interpretation” that God addressed some other beings or creation itself as partners in the creative process (285). Third, some conclude God merely referred to himself like English royalty refer to themselves as *we* (285).

Wolfhart Pannenberg understands the unity of members of the Trinity as “self-differentiation as mutual dependence” (qtd. in Grenz 50). The relationship among the three persons of the Trinity is central, foundational, and internal to the Trinity’s very

being: “The doctrine of the Trinity does not propose that God is three persons who have relations, but three subsistent relations that are in fact persons” (Grenz 50-51). God’s very being is communion (50), and “there is not true being without communion” (Zizioulas 18). While humans “*have* relationships; God *is* the relations that he has...” (original emphasis; Lash 32). However, one must not focus on the interrelationship of the Trinity apart from God’s purpose in salvation. To do so would cause “a one-sided theology of God” that neglects the work of Christ and the Spirit, exhibited as incarnation and grace, in the lives of humans (LaCugna 210). Catherine Mowry LaCugna says, “The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about ‘God’ but a teaching about *God’s life with us and our life with each other*. It is a life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other” (original emphasis; 228). “‘God’s way of being in relationship *with us*’ is in fact God’s personhood, for ‘God for us is who God is as God’” (original emphasis; 304-05). Because God made humans in the image of the Trinitarian God, humans find themselves permanently in a web of relationships, with God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and with each other (Boff 149).

Unity of Humans with God

For over a thousand years, most Christians assumed that being made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) meant humans are rational beings like God (Grenz 143). This understanding originated, not from biblical understanding, but with church fathers influenced by the Greek philosophical tradition (143). Despite the wide acceptance of this view throughout Christian history, many theologians in the past century have studied and questioned what God meant when he said he created humans in the image of God (162). Some suggested that by creating humans in the *imago Dei* God meant (1) humans are

similar to God in some way (physically and spiritually), (2) humans are God's counterpart (able to be in relationship with God), (3) humans, like God, have dominion over creation, and (4) humans are God's representatives or agents (Grenz 193, 195-97).

The most accepted view that emerged was the relational understanding that focused more on what humans are in relationship to God and others rather than what they do (e.g., think rationally) or possess (e.g., logic; Grenz 162). The New Testament describes three basic views of the *imago Dei*: (1) an eschatological goal—humans will be fully conformed in the image of Christ when they are glorified with God in heaven (224), (2) a *process* in the present reality—God continues to shape humans into God's image in this world (240), and (3) a *task* in the present reality—humans participate in the process by putting off the old self and putting on the new self (251). These three views of the *imago Dei* may also reflect three views of the unity God desires humans to have: (1) eschatological unity, the ultimate communion and unity with God and others in heaven, (2) soteriological unity, the process of humans being saved by being united with God in this world, and (3) functional unity, the task of the present reality as humans strive to live in unity with others in this world, which is manifested in behaviors and attitudes associated with being in communion and unity with God.

Unity of Humans with Each Other

LaCugna understands that the Trinity encompasses relationships beyond the Trinity:

The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about “God” but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other* [original emphasis]. It is a life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other. (228)

God created humans to be in unity and communion with God, as well as with each other. Jesus alluded to this idea when he quoted the Great Commandment: “‘Love the Lord your God with your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39). Humans cannot be fully human or fulfill the command to love one another if they do not live in community with one another (Brunner 106): “[T]o be in Christ is to have discovered the true community.... Paul knows nothing of solitary salvation” (Davies 86). Humans cannot be who God intended them to be apart from the body of Christ.

As illustrated in the United Methodist Church’s Holy Communion liturgy, pastors pray, “By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 10). As Raymond E. Brown suggests, “Heavenly unity is both the model and source of unity of believers” (769). This unity is not of human efforts; otherwise, Jesus would not have prayed to the Father for it (776). However, humans do not play a passive role, “but their action is not the primary source of unity” (776). Humans must be *one*, have a soteriological unity, with Christ before they can be *one*, have a functional unity, with each other that manifests itself in functional Christlike behaviors and attitudes.

Christ wants humans to be one with each other as parts of a body are one: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:4-5). The unity of believers is exemplified in 1 Corinthians

12, where all parts of the body are joined together as one, need each other, and have different gifts for the purpose of working together as one for the common good.

In Ephesians 4:1, Paul makes more than a casual request when he pleads with followers to live (or walk) “a life worthy of the calling,” which they received from God (Barth 426). This life, as Paul describes in verse 2, should be “completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love,” signs of the unity to which Paul calls the people to live.

In Colossians 3:12-14, Paul makes a similar request to “God’s chosen people”:

[C]lothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

In the Greek translation, Paul appears to make an elementary grammatical error by using a neuter relative pronoun, which, instead of the feminine that is required to modify love (ὅτι; Mulholland, *Deeper Journey* 134-16). He calls people to put on not just any kind of love but *the* love, indicating a very specific love. Paul uses a neuter relative pronoun required to modify both the feminine word, *love*, and the masculine word, *the Lord*, that appear in the previous sentence. Therefore, Paul is not just saying God’s chosen people should put on *love* but they should “put on Christ” (Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012). Paul says the same thing in Romans 13:14: “[C]lothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.” When Paul concludes Colossians 3:14 by saying love binds God’s people together, he is not saying just *any* kind of love binds people together in perfect unity, but Christ himself.

In 3:15-16, Paul reiterates the idea of putting on Christ as he continues the plea: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,” and “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you

richly....” The “peace of Christ” to which Paul refers results from a state of reconciliation with God (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:16-17); therefore, putting on the love, Christ, results in reconciliation, oneness, or unity with God. In Colossians, the “Word” is the “mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3). In 1:25-26, Paul defines the “Word of God” as the “mystery,” and in 1:27, the “mystery” as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Therefore, to “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” is to have Christ’s indwelling presence that is the bond of wholeness or unity (3:14; Mulholland, *Deeper Journey* 137). The indwelling Word or unity with Christ, then, affects persons’ relationships with others, resulting in teaching and reproving one another, worshiping God with gratitude in their hearts, and doing everything in the name of Jesus (3:16-17).

Paul’s call to let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly is similar to God’s call from the Old Testament to meditate on and live God’s Word:

You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
(Deut. 11:18-20, NRSV)

The psalmist similarly writes, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). In Colossians 3:17, Paul summarizes how the faithful should live by calling them to do everything, in word or deed, “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” All these verses imply the same conclusion: When believers dwell in the Word and put on Christ, the natural result is that their behaviors become Christlike.

Returning to the topic of unity in Ephesians 4, in verse 3 Paul called the church to “[m]ake every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of [the] peace.” The English translations omit the definite article *the* before peace, but it is present in the

Greek. Therefore, Paul again refers to a specific peace like “the peace” in Col. 3:14, the peace that results from a state of reconciliation with God. The word for *bond* (συνδεσμος) in Ephesians 4:3 is the same as in Colossians 3:14. These similarities seem to show that Paul is talking about the same thing in both passages. The unity Paul called the church to maintain (Eph. 4:3) is a gift from God (not of human ability or effort; Barth 428-29) and a unity (as described in his confession in 4:4-6) in “one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Again, oneness believers have with one another results from their oneness with God.

In as much as the passages in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 1 and 3 have so much in common, the *hope* in both letters are likely related. The “hope of your calling” in Ephesians 4:4 likely refers to the calling of God’s believers to experience the “mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). The hope of a believer’s calling is to experience union with Christ, the essence—*glory*—of being Christlike (Mulholland, *Deeper Journey* 137, 14-15). Thus, the unity for which Christ prays in John 17:22 is not a future but a present reality.

The present reality of a believer’s unity with Christ results in unity with other believers in the body of Christ. Christ purposely gave believers different gifts “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). The verb in verse 12 (καταρτισμὸν) translated “to equip the saints” is derived from a verb that means “to reconcile,” “to set bones,” “to restore,” “to prepare,” “to create” (Barth 439). Thus, Paul calls the faithful to use their different gifts to reconcile and make one (as in setting a bone) the different members of the body. The members should use their gifts to build up the body of Christ until all members *attain* unity of the faith, the faith of

Christ, and become mature in Christ (4:13). The *unity in the faith* refers to the loving union Jesus described in John 17:20: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...” (Mulholland, *Deeper Journey* 14). In using the word

πᾶν σεως to speak of the “knowledge of the Son of God,” Paul does not refer to mere head knowledge of knowing about the Son of God but an experiential knowledge, as in knowing the Son of God through one’s own personal experience of living in loving union with him. The maturity to which Paul refers is Christlikeness—members should continue to use their gifts to build up the body of Christ until all members reach maturity in Christ by becoming like him (Message 12 July 2011). While complete maturity and unity (eschatological unity) will not happen until Christ glorifies all believers in heaven, Scripture clearly indicates believers in this world will experience oneness with Christ (soteriological unity) and oneness with others within the body of Christ (functional unity) that become manifest in behaviors and attitudes associated with being in communion and unity with God—for this oneness with Christ and others is to be a witness to the world.

The Importance of Unity to God’s Mission

Christian unity is vital to God’s mission. In John 17, Jesus prayed that Christians would be one so that the world may believe and know the Father sent the Son and loves them, so they, too, may be reconciled to God and become one with God and each other. The mission of God, drawing people into relationship with God, then flows from the relational Trinitarian nature of God himself (Wright 63). As the Father sent the Son, and the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit to humans, humans become part of the divine sending to reveal the love and unity of God to the world (Wright 63). God made humans in the *imago Dei* so humans would participate in the *missio Dei*:

As a unifying force, the church is the messianic people of Christ, for unity is not merely an attribute of the church; it is the church's task in the world as well. If the assembled church is the confessing church, then it will represent the unity in Christ and the Spirit that makes all things new in the midst of the conflicts of its social and political situation. That is why the unifying power of the sacraments cannot be separated from the tasks and forces of social and political justice. The unity of Christ, which must not be divided, is not only unity with his disciples and the fellowship of believers, but based on that, is also his unity and fellowship with the oppressed, humiliated and forsaken. The church would not witness to the whole of Christ if it were not a fellowship of believers with the poor, a fellowship of the hopeful with the sick, and a fellowship of the loving with the oppressed. Its unity would no longer be a "predicate of the time of salvation" if it were not to achieve liberation for the downtrodden, justice for those without rights, and peace in social conflicts. It is not "one for itself"; it is one for the peace of divided mankind in the coming kingdom of God. In this respect "unity in freedom," and "freedom in unity" become particularly important. (Moltmann 345-46)

Moltmann asserts that the unity of believers with each other exemplifies how the believers, the Church, should also be one with the oppressed, poor, and sick of the world. The unity within the body of Christ becomes Christ's witness in the world. Unity and mission are inseparable.

Because God calls the church, the body of Christ, to reflect the character (the love and unity) of God to the world (Grenz 305), divisiveness (lack of unity) within the church hampers its mission (Moltmann 345-46; Oden 308; O'Connor 39; Davidson abstract; Mshanga 322; John Paul 98; Baker 36; Clifford 337; Pohl 72-73). As Grenz says, "[T]he image of God does not lie in the individual per se but in the relationality of persons in community" (305). The world will have difficulty discovering and believing the truth, or the One who is the Truth, if Christians argue about and cannot agree on it themselves (Lawrence 25; John Paul 98). Pope John Paul II asserts, "[T]he lack of unity among Christians contradicts the Truth which Christians have the mission to spread and,

consequently, it gravely damages their witness” (98). Unity in Christ is not only a gift but a great calling and challenge so that “the world may believe” (“In Search of Unity”).

Unity in the Old Testament

Unity in the Old Testament is generally portrayed as community or kinship. From the beginning, God created humans to be in community and commanded humans to take care of one another in community. In Genesis 2:18, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” God commanded the people to help kin who fell into hard times (Lev. 25:25, 35-38, 47-49). God commanded people to take care of orphans, widows, and aliens (Deut. 10:18; 27:19; Isa. 1:16-17) because God did not want them to be alone or to have no one to care for them. God also commanded the people not to abuse (Exod. 22:22-24) or deprive (Deut. 27:19) widows and orphans of justice but to care for them by not harvesting the edges of the fields (Deut. 24:19-22).

Kinship (אָב) refers to those who are members of a group identified as a *people*. A *people* might identify themselves based on their family, clan, tribe, or nation, such as the Jewish people who identify themselves as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6, 15-16; Deut. 29:10-13).

Unity in the New Testament

Christians inherited the Jewish concept that the people of God were “brothers and sisters” (deSilva 200). Jews believed they were children of God either because of their bloodline, being descendants of Abraham, or because of their faith, being born into or converting to the Jewish faith (200). Christians believed people became children of God through faith by believing and having a relationship with Jesus Christ; therefore, all who

believed in Jesus became children of God and brothers and sisters of each other in faith (200). They became believers and kin, not by the blood of Abraham but by the blood of Jesus (212).

In the New Testament era, kinship had a *code of ethics* that required kin to behave in a certain way toward each other, and this behavior often differed from how they treated outsiders, people who were not kin (deSilva 165-66). The code of ethics of the *household of faith* included (1) love for one another (213), (2) sharing of resources (215), (3) unity and harmony (216), (4) cooperation and mutual honoring (220), and (5) reconciliation (223).

First, love for one another, as Jesus commanded in John 13:34 and 15:17, was to be the church's "essential mark, so that the world will recognize their connection with Jesus by the love they show one another (John 13:35)" (deSilva 213). The love (*αγάπη*) to which Jesus referred is "a radically other-referenced, non-self-referenced way of being with others" (Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012), as manifested in his sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, believers showed their mutual love in practical ways by laying down their lives for each other (John 15:13), helping a brother or sister in need (1 John 3:16-18), serving one another (Gal. 5:13), not harming or causing another to stumble (1 Cor. 8:11-13; Rom. 14:15, 21), and not looking to their own interests but to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4; deSilva 214-15).

Second, sharing of resources became an expected reality among believers (Heb. 13:16; Acts 4:32, 34-35) so that no one among them would be in need (Deut. 15:4; Acts 4:34; deSilva 215). The sharing of resources also then became proof of their other-referenced love. Helping one another extended beyond the boundaries of faith, as God

expected them to show hospitality to visitors and outcasts, too (Heb. 13:2; Rom. 12:13; Tit. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 John 8; deSilva 215-16).

Third, unity and harmony were expected among brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul (in Phil. 2:1-4) condemns “all rivalry, all selfish ambition and everything else that contributes to disunity as out of place in the church” (deSilva 218). Paul calls believers not to have divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:10-11) or to sue one another (1 Cor. 6:5-8) at the risk of disgracing their supposed faith and values before unbelievers (219), but to be “of one mind” (1 Pet. 3:8; Acts 4:32; Phil. 1:17-28; 2:1-4; 4:2-3). Paul’s repeated call does not mean believers have to agree on all points of doctrine to be brothers and sisters in Christ (219), for no one fully understands God, God’s Word, or God’s ways (Job 11:7-8; Ps. 139:6; Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 8:2; 13:9-12). Rather, the Greek word used for mind (φρονεω) refers to a deep orientation of one’s being, the core where a believer finds his or her identity in Christ.

In Colossians, Paul clarifies where believers should find their identity and deep orientation of being:

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. (3:1-7)

According to Paul, when believers die to and put to death their sinful, selfish way of living (their false self), they find their identity in Christ, and Christ becomes their life. If

Christ truly becomes their life, then they should become more and more like Christ in how they love and treat one another.

Paul describes how believers should be towards one another:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:1-8)

Therefore, to have the mind of Christ is to have “a radically non-self-referenced way of being for others” (Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012). Paul further explains that this type of being includes the following: “not [to] be haughty, but [to] associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are” (Rom. 12:16); to “put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1); to “please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor” (Rom. 15:2); and to “[w]elcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7), so that “together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6). Only when believers find their identity in Christ and Christ becomes their life will they live a humble, loving, and non-self-referenced way of being and find true unity in Christ and unity with each other.

Fourth, cooperation and mutual honoring among believers were expected (deSilva 220). Jesus rebuked the disciples for competing with each other for positions of privilege (Mark 10:35-45), and he rebuked the Pharisees for seeking honor above other Jews (Matt.

23:5-9). Believers must honor one another *above* themselves (Rom. 12:10; Luke 14:10; Phil. 2:3), not compete with one another. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the metaphor of a body to emphasize the ethos of cooperation and mutual honoring expected in the body of Christ:

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Cor. 12:24-26)

The believers' unity with Christ resulted in their unity with each other, as manifested in their cooperation with others and honoring others better than themselves.

Fifth and finally, reconciliation was another vital part of the ethos among kin, brothers and sisters in the body of Christ (deSilva 223). Believers cannot be truly one with God and worship God if their relationship with others is broken; therefore, they must seek reconciliation with others (Matt. 5:22-24). The unity to which Jesus and Paul called believers, unity with Christ and others, manifested itself as fellowship (κοινωνία) and hospitality (φιλοφρόνως). Fellowship (κοινωνία) implied a close, mutual relationship between God and believers or between believers (1 John 1:3), and a relationship shaped by grace and truth as exemplified by the incarnate Christ in John 1:14-16 (Pohl 74).

When God Does Not Want Unity

As much as God desires and calls for unity, the Bible describes various situations when God did not desire unity. Before sending out the twelve disciples to preach, heal, and cast out evil spirits (Matt. 10:1-7), Jesus told them, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (10:14); "[a]ll men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be

saved” (10:22); and, “[w]hoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (10:32-33). In each of these cases, Jesus called the disciples to remain true to God’s Word, even if others rejected and hated them. In other words, Jesus called them to choose faithfulness to God’s Word and unity with Christ over unity with others who rejected Christ and his word.

Jesus went on to say he did not come to bring peace:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Matt. 10:34-38)

In these verses, Jesus clarified that his followers, his disciples, must love Christ more than anyone else, and if their choice to follow Christ turned their loved ones away from them, they should still follow Christ. Again, Jesus called his disciples to choose unity with and obedience to Christ over unity with their family.

In 2 John, the Apostle John describes love:

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. (2 John 1:6-11)

God's Word instructs followers to obey God's commands and to walk and live in love. Living in love includes watching out for and disassociating from deceivers who do not continue in Christ's teaching because to welcome the person would be to participate in the person's sinful or wicked work. In other words, followers of Christ cannot have true unity with those who reject Christ and do not obey his teaching because they do not have unity with God (v. 9). Believers' unity with each other is dependent upon each person's unity with Christ. Therefore, verse 10 "forbids the Christian to say welcome to anyone whose doctrine is not orthodox!" (Brown 775). Even in church discipline, Jesus commanded believers to treat as a Gentile or tax collector one who refused the loving correction and discipline offered by the church (Matt. 18:17).

In both the Old and New Testaments, God instructed people not to unite themselves in marriage with unbelievers (Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:1-4; 2 Cor. 6:14-18) because the unbelievers would tempt them to follow their gods and draw them away from worshipping the one true God. Paul describes further that righteousness and wickedness have nothing in common:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:14-18, NIV)

Paul clarifies that righteousness and wickedness, light and darkness, believers and unbelievers do not have anything in common and cannot be in true fellowship with one another because for the believer, true fellowship with one another is dependent upon first

being in fellowship with God. Thus, God does not desire unity with others if that unity would hinder or destroy one's unity with God.

This understanding of not joining light with darkness and believers with unbelievers calls into question the ecclesial, institutional, functional, practical, or missional unity some strive to have in the church. If one group of believers, the more conservative or the more liberal, believes (1) another group is not living according to God's Word, and (2) unity with the other group hinders their ability to follow God's Word and live out God's mission, they may believe that true spiritual unity with the other is impossible. In their understanding of God's Word and the situation, they believe they should not unite themselves with others who, to them, seem to be unbelievers.

How Believers in Biblical Times Dealt with Disunity and Conflict

As much as God calls believers to unity, believers and the church have experienced much conflict and disunity throughout the ages. The Bible describes ways people dealt with their conflict to try to find greater unity.

In Matthew 18:15-22, Jesus instructed believers what to do when someone sinned against them. Some textual variants do not include the words *against you*; therefore, Jesus could be simply saying, "When someone sins." First, a believer should go privately to speak with the person who sinned, to help the person see the sin and restore relationships with God and the other believer. If the one who sinned does not listen, then the believer should take one or two other members of the church with them to provide witnesses to attest to the situation and help the person realize the reality of their sin. If the one who sinned still does not repent, then the believer should bring the situation before the church, and if the person still does not repent, Jesus instructed the church to

disassociate with the person and treat him or her as an unbeliever. Jesus assured the disciples of their authority to forgive or discipline:

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. (Matt. 18:18-20)

In speaking of loosing and binding, Jesus meant the church, as the instrument of God, could proclaim forgiveness of sin or judgment when a person was not truly repentant (Wilkins 619-21). Though many people take verses 19 and 20 out of context and apply them to agreement in prayer, Jesus specifically speaks of the unity of the church in making a decision about a member who sins. In other words, when two or three of them come together to seek Jesus' guidance in a decision of forgiveness or judgment, Jesus is with them and confirms their decision to forgive or to discipline by disassociating with the unrepentant sinner (619-21). The goal of this entire process is not to discipline but to restore the sinner to a right relationship with God and other believers, thus restoring unity. However, Jesus gave the church the authority to discipline an unrepentant sinner, if needed, to try to restore unity with God and the church.

In Acts 6:1-7, the number of disciples rapidly increased in the first century church, but the Greek-speaking Jews complained that the Hebrew-speaking Jews overlooked the Greek-speaking widows in the daily distribution of food. The twelve gathered with all the disciples to resolve the issue. They knew the issue was important, but they knew they should not neglect their own God-given calling of the ministry of the word and prayer to wait on tables. Therefore, they said to choose seven men full of the Spirit and of wisdom and turn the responsibility over to them. The names of the men

chosen appear to be Greek. Thus, they chose men who would be certain to take care of the interests of the overlooked widows, and, at the same time, be sure the Hebrew widows were being treated equitably so the same charges could not be brought against them. The apostles laid hands on them and prayed for them, commissioning them for the ministry. Because the apostles could continue their ministry of the word, the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. By listening to the needs of the people and taking them seriously, the apostles prayerfully found a solution that restored their unity and enhanced their mission by making many more disciples of Jesus Christ.

Seen by many as an historic event that shaped the early Church, the Jerusalem Council, as recorded in Acts 15, demonstrated how the early Church handled conflict and dealt with significant ethnic division between Jews and Gentiles (Witherington, *Acts* 439). Some Jews went from Judea to Antioch and began teaching that circumcision was required for salvation (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas sharply disagreed and entered into a heated debate with those men (Acts 15:2). To find resolution, the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas and some other believers to appeal to the judgment of the apostles in Jerusalem, indicating they believed the Jerusalem church had some authority over converts in other locations (452). The most common method of ancient times to resolve such a conflict involved calling a meeting of the people to “listen to and consider speeches following conventions of deliberative rhetoric” to overcome disunity and to find unity (450).

After much discussion, Peter appealed to his own experiences that God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentile believers at Cornelius’ house, even before they were baptized

with water, indicating that they, like the Jews, were saved by grace through faith, not by following the law that required them to be circumcised (Acts 15:7-11). Everyone listened intently as Paul and Barnabas then gave witness to all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles (15:12). When they finished, James appealed to Peter's experience and to Scripture that God planned from the beginning to rebuild and restore the remnant of Israel to reach and minister to the Gentiles "over whom [God's] name has been called" (15:16-17). However, James limits the inclusion of Gentiles to those who became *God-fearers*—who had to follow the Jewish requirements to participate in the Jewish community ("abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" [15:20]), but they did not have to become *proselytes*, which required circumcision (Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012).

Neither the Pharisaic faction (15:5) nor the Pauline faction liked this resolution. While the Gentile believers at Antioch rejoiced at the news that they did not have to be circumcised (15:31), Paul later encouraged believers not to argue over disputable issues such as whether meat was clean or unclean (Rom. 14:1-15:3)—in direct opposition to the Jerusalem Council's decision that they should not eat food sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29). As a result, the first split in Christianity began, with *Jewish* Christianity and *Pauline* Christianity going their separate ways. Within a couple centuries, the Pauline Christianity prevailed, and the Jewish Christianity died out (Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012).

In Paul's letter to the church of Rome, he called for the Jews and Gentiles to live in unity (Rom. 12:1-21; 15:5-13). He exhorted the people to be reconciled to God and to each other, else they destroy their mission and witness to the world, for the church should

exemplify “God’s eschatological plan to unite all people in Christ throughout the world by grace through faith...” (Witherington, *Paul’s Letter* 328). In Romans 14:1-15:13, Paul encouraged the believers not to argue over disputable issues such as whether meat was clean or unclean, or whether one day was holier than another. God held them accountable for their attitudes toward each other as much as he did for their actions or decisions that caused divisions between them (128). They should not live for themselves but for the glory of God (Rom. 14:7-8). Persons who please God live in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17; Witherington 340).

Paul exhorted the people not to act in a way that would cause another person to stumble in faith (Rom. 14:13) but to live in a way that led to peace and to make every effort to build up each other (Rom. 14:19). Christian freedom does not have concern for one’s own desires or rights but acts out of love and concern for others (deSilva 214). Thus, Christians should refuse to do harm to kin, which was the same as causing harm to themselves (214). One no longer walks in love if his or her actions harm another believer by causing the person to stumble (Rom. 14:15):

Most ecclesiastical debates I have witnessed tend to pursue an alternative strategy, namely, forcing one’s perceived freedom on the rest of the family of faith, trying to maneuver one’s way into making them “live with it” and “accept it.” Our commitment to enjoying and enforcing our rights inevitably results in shattering the body of Christ into ever more splinters. It is an American way but not a Christian way. (deSilva 215)

Similarly, Paul exhorted the Romans not to force their freedoms on one another but to live in love. For when the body of believers lived in love and accepted one another as Christ accepted them, they reflected the very nature of their merciful and welcoming God. Their unity with each other pointed to the greater eschatological unity of God with all believers (Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* 345).

Signs of Unity in the Church

The Scripture describes various signs of unity in the church. The early Church fathers understood from Scripture that God called for Christians to live in unity, as evidenced by the Apostles' Creed, which affirms "one, holy, catholic church," and the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, which affirms "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" (Moltmann 337, 381). These "attributes become the inalienable signs of the true church, which is to say the church in the truth of God" (338). As statements of faith, the creeds signify the soteriological unity Christ brings to believers. As statements of hope, the creeds proclaim the eschatological unity in the future. As statements of action, the creeds declare that the church *ought* to be one and thus signify signs of functional unity the body of Christ should manifest (333-39). Because unity and mission are inseparable, part of the functional unity is manifested in missional unity—unity in mission to the world. This study looked at the signs of soteriological, functional, and missional unity.

Signs of Soteriological Unity

Soteriological or spiritual unity occurs when believers find salvation through faith in Christ and become one with Christ and the Trinitarian Godhead. If believers are one with the Trinity, they participate in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and therefore become like Christ: humble (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12), selfless and seeking the good of others (Phil. 2:3-4), no longer living for themselves (Gal. 2:20), and doing everything in the name of Jesus as Jesus would do it (Col. 3:17). Believers experience an organic union with Christ in that humans are like a branch connected to the vine; they are connected to Christ and cannot survive or produce anything on their own (John 15:4-5). They allow Jesus Christ to be head or Lord of their lives, have the Holy Spirit living in them (1 John 4:13-15), and

experience the joy and peace of God (Gal. 5:22). If Christ is Lord in believers' lives, then they abide in and obey God's Word (Col. 3:16; John 14:23; 2 John 9), and live lives of sacrifice and servanthood (Phil. 2:6-7). Finally, when believers have the Holy Spirit living in them, they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Signs of Functional Unity

Functional unity describes the practical unity believers have with one another because of their soteriological unity. Since Christ is the head of the body (Eph. 4:15; Col. 2:10), the body follows the direction of and has the same heart and mind of Christ. If the members of the body of Christ have the same heart as Christ, they show the following signs of functional unity with one another: love (Col. 3:14), compassion (Col. 3:12), kindness (Col. 3:12), gentleness (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12), peace (Col. 3:15), forgiveness (Col. 3:13), patience (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12), and reconciliation (Matt. 5:22-34). Believers should also bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13), bear with the failings of the weak (Rom. 15:1), accept those who are weak (Rom. 14:1), not judge or look down on others (Rom. 14:1-3), not harm or cause another to stumble (1 Cor. 8:11-13; Rom. 14:13-15, 21), live in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Rom. 14:17), not quarrel (2 Tim. 2:24), cooperate with and honor each other (1 Cor. 12:24-26), and teach and admonish one another with all wisdom (Col. 3:16).

When members of the body of Christ have the mind of Christ, they live in a radically non-self-referenced way of being for others (Mulholland, Message 22 Mar. 2012; Ackerman 362; Witherington, *Conflict* 6421). As a result, they do not please themselves but please others for the purpose of building them up (Rom. 15:1-2), look to

the interests of others (Phil. 2:4), live in thankfulness (Col. 3:15; Phil. 4:6) and harmony (1 Cor. 1:10-11), use their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4; Rom. 12:4-5), speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), keep their promises (Matt. 5:37), and share resources (Acts 4:24).

Signs of Missional Unity

When believers experience unity with Christ and each other, they experience oneness of heart, not only for God and each other but in loving their neighbors as Jesus described in the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40). In their love for all people, they will make Jesus' love evident to all (John 13:35), as witnessed in their sharing of resources (Heb. 13:16; Acts 4:32, 34-35), living lives of sacrifice and servanthood (Phil. 2:6-7), welcoming others (Rom. 15:7), and practicing hospitality (Rom. 12:13) to the lost, hurting, marginalized, outcast, forgotten, and all. Also out of their love for God and all people, they should experience unity in purpose (Phil. 2:2) and mission to the world—going into all the world to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] commanded [them]” (Matt. 28:19-20).

How to Measure Signs of Unity in the Church

By evaluating the perceived degree that these signs of soteriological, functional, and missional unity are exhibited, persons can measure the perceived relative increase or decrease in unity as observed by members of a group.

Strategies for Building Unity

Although the “unity of the Church is a spiritual entity” (Kung 353), humans do not play a passive role, “but their action is not the primary source of unity” (Brown 776).

Paul exhorted the church in Ephesus, and by extension all Christians, to “make every effort to keep [maintain] the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) and to use their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ until all attain unity and become mature in Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). Although unity is a gift from God, believers must work to maintain or attain the fullness of it. People have attempted many ways to maintain or attain unity.

Conflict Resolution

Various groups of people have practiced conflict resolution as an attempt to maintain or attain unity. Groups have tried to resolve conflict by avoiding, incorporating and discerning, or engaging it.

Avoidance. Peaceful societies, such as the Amish, Anabaptist, and other religious and nonreligious societies around the world, generally have a strong commitment to nonviolence, and so they do everything they can to avoid conflict (Bonta 416). While most Westerners view conflict as normal and productive, most of the twenty-four peaceful societies researched do not. Therefore, instead of using direct negotiation to resolve conflict, as Westerners often do (415), members of peaceful societies tend to rely on self-restraint; separation by avoiding or walking away from conflict rather than confronting it; in extreme cases, shunning; humor to reduce or dissipate tension; or meetings designed to reduce tension, even if the conflict cannot be resolved. If these do not work, they may also try negotiation or an intervention (406-07). In his study, Bruce D. Bonta also observed that stronger family ties within a group tended to reduce the levels of conflict (413), presumably because of their commitment to love and care for their family, their kin.

Incorporation and discernment. The early Church, as seen in Acts 15, did not avoid but realized conflict as an ordinary part of life. Therefore, they incorporated “conflict and disagreement into the life of the community” (Rowe). First, the early Church experienced the Holy Spirit, second, they agreed on the Spirit’s work with Scripture, and third, they relied on the structure of their ecclesial authority to discern God’s will for them in making the final decision (Rowe). C. Kavin Rowe concludes that any community that sacrifices any of these three elements will be unable to integrate conflict and disagreement.

Engagement. Persons and organizations have created and suggested many models for engaging and resolving conflict, such as problem-solving workshops (Hill 115-17); holy conferencing, as used by the West Ohio Conference (see Appendix E; Bray), and mediation (Moore 3). Many conflict resolution techniques boil down to good communication. According to the JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation, “[a]ll peacebuilding can be summed up in listening” (“Engage Conflict Well”). Thus, listening is a vital part of engaging the conflict.

Dialogue and Communication

The United Methodist Church held two theological dialogues sponsored by the Commission of Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns to try to understand and find unity. After the dialogues, participants drafted in 1998 a paper entitled “In Search of Unity.” In referring to various disagreements on theological issues, the paper notes, “All these arise out of differing understandings of scriptural authority and revelation.” While communication in the dialogue sessions may have helped to increase understanding of the disunity and underlying issues, it did not seem to build unity.

The West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force used and introduced to the annual conference the practices of “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love” (see Appendix D). These practices of communication and dialogue may build unity in the fact that participants agree to abide by them and to listen and speak the truth in love. While they may not build deeper unity, they may at least prevent further division and disunity.

Symbolic Unity

Another form of communication that can be used in conflict management or leadership, in general, is symbolic leadership—“the sending and receiving of messages in the form of verbal and non-verbal symbols to generate meaning” (Vickrey 315).

According to Michael G. Hackman and Craig E. Johnson, “Communication is based on the transfer of symbols ... that allows for the creation of meaning within individuals” (6).

Leaders, then, use communication with symbols to persuade others “to pursue a common goal that is important for the welfare of the group” (Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan 493).

Through personal, group, organizational, and public communication, leaders converse with arbitrary, ambiguous, and alternate symbols that cause and create change in organizations (Vickrey 316). While the leaders cannot change behavior of those they are leading, effective leaders create meaningful symbols and activities through communication to help the people understand and choose to practice the proposed behavior. A person who has the ability to help people “make sense of things and to put them into language meaningful to large numbers of people” has great influence (Pondy 94-95).

The Unity Task Force provided symbolic leadership to the West Ohio Conference. By verbally communicating and modeling agreeing and disagreeing in love,

holy conferencing, building relationships with and sharing intentional and strategic leadership with people on opposite sides of the great theological divide, offering a prayer for the entire conference to pray for the 2008 delegates to general conference, and hosting several gatherings of leaders to include others in the discussion, the Unity Task Force worked to help people understand and live principles of unity.

Educational Training

Part of the Unity Task Force's symbolic leadership included organizing and hosting workshops and seminars to educate lay and clergy members about various perspectives of points of disagreement. The Christology Conference (19 September 2006) focused not on the hot topic of homosexuality but on the underlying issues of people's different understandings of Christology. The leadership forum (5 June 2007), "A Conversation about Our Understandings of Homosexuality," provided an opportunity for leaders to reflect and converse about people's differing views of homosexuality and the church. The Unity Task Force worked with the West Ohio Conference Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns to host "Will You Hear Me Now? A Day of Christian Conversation about Homosexuality and the Church" (12 October 2007).

The Unity Task Force, in cooperation with the West Ohio Conference Connectional Ministries, hosted a "Unity Gathering and Dialogue" (14 November 2008) to (1) "create an environment for open-ended conversation with an expanded group beyond the Unity Task Force," (2) "allow ministry focus groups and caucuses with different goals and values to come together in a non-legislative setting to develop a deeper understanding of other organizations and constituencies in the Conference," and (3) "acknowledge and affirm the role caucuses and ministry focus groups play in the life

of the Conference” (Ough, Letter 23 Oct. 2008). All participants were asked to follow respectful communication guidelines (see Appendix G; “Respectful Communication Guidelines”). The Unity Task Force and Connectional Ministries hosted a “Gathering of Leaders” (11 May 2009) for “an honest conversation about unity” (Unity Task Force, 11 May 2009) and to continue the discussion begun at the 14 November 2008 meeting. On Meeting Minutes¹⁶ October 2010, the Unity Task Force hosted the seminar “Covenant in the Midst of Conflict” to educate persons on the Wesleyan understanding of covenant and living out that covenant in the midst of conflict.

Legislation

Some believe that no one can legislate morality, but others try. While legislation cannot force people to have moral ideals, legislation can guide people to practice moral behavior. Similarly, church leadership bodies cannot force people to be united or experience unity in the biblical sense of the word, but they can legislate certain behaviors that at least lead to more civil behavior. The civil behavior, then, may provide an opportunity for persons to begin to see and respect each other as persons made in the image of God and to see and hear the Christ in their midst who can make them one.

With this understanding and especially after the tension, divisiveness, and rancor experienced in the midst of the 2003 elections of the West Ohio delegates and alternates to the 2004 General and Jurisdictional Conference, the Unity Task Force spent months drafting and preparing legislation that would guide the behaviors of the 2007 election process for the 2008 General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation. After seeking input from caucus and other influential leaders in the West Ohio Conference, the Unity Task Force revised and then presented to the annual conference Resolution #7, “Election

of Delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences” (see Appendix F). The conference amended and then adopted the resolution. The annual conference followed the procedures in 2007 and again, after amending them slightly, in 2011.

I e-mailed Bishop Sally Dyck, chair of the Council of Bishop’s Unity Task Force, to ask if anyone had researched the effect of the 2004 Unity Resolution at general conference. Bishop Dyck indicated many have worked to build unity, but she was unaware of any specific follow-up on the Unity Resolution as to whether or not it made any difference in the United Methodist Church.

Community Building

People experience unity through community; therefore, some seek to build unity by building community. Jesus took a very diverse group of men, spent three years with them in close community, and, with the exception of Judas whom Scriptures say was destined to be lost, they became a united force. Although they did not always agree on everything, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, God worked through them to change the world. Through the unity and community they experienced with Christ, they invited others to join them. The Celtic way of evangelism focused on bringing people into community until they chose to become part of the Christian community (Hunter 55). Thus, when people found community and unity with others, they found community and unity with God and his mission to the world. Pohl explains that daily acts of fellowship, hospitality, and sharing grow into strong relationships, and from those strong relationships grew a strong community (86), and in that strong community, the people worked through their differences to maintain community and unity (88). As the strong community models God’s love toward each other, people see and are drawn to that love,

so they, like the Celtic way of evangelism, extend the unity to those beyond the body of Christ (71-72).

Pastors in the Northwest Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church experienced an increase in community and unity when the conference placed them in *incubators* (strategic small groups) where they worshipped together, shared their faith stories, gained leadership skills, and developed ministry action plans for their local churches (Whitfield). The incubators provided noteworthy results:

A significant byproduct of the process was that pastors who were seriously divided over theological issues became friends, prayed for each other regularly, and gained a new insight into their common commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
(Whitfield)

Their efforts of building community also built unity.

Unity Task Force Groups

While some unity task force groups do exist and have existed, I did not find any research analyzing them or their effectiveness. Therefore, in March 2011, I conducted my own research. I e-mailed all the United Methodist bishops in the US, except for West Ohio, to ask if they had (at that time) or previously had a unity task force. If they still had a task force, I asked for a person I could contact for more information. I received responses from thirty-three of the fifty-six annual conferences. Of those who responded, none had a current Unity Task Force, and two had, or may have had, a similar group in the past but were disbanded. Six conferences provided some sort of dialogue opportunities in the conference for people to discuss their theological differences, and two formed pastor groups that helped the pastors build relationships and unity. One conference indicated the conference dealt with their diversity with openness and respect

and that none of the *wedge* groups “found sufficient traction to create a lack of unity within the Annual Conference” (Whitfield). One conference had a covenant presented at clergy session that encouraged everyone to remain civil even if they disagreed, and one focused on the annual conference’s clear mission and vision (instead of the theological differences) and looked for ways to celebrate their unity.

The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church has had a Unity Task Force. The group of theologically diverse bishops met periodically to discuss and try to discern how they can help build unity within the denomination. They met separately with leaders from different theological perspectives to hear their views and to try to maintain unity to move the denomination forward in living out its mission. To my knowledge, no work has been done to evaluate the task force’s effectiveness.

While many people and groups have used various techniques to try to maintain or build unity, a literature gap exists in the analysis of whether the techniques have helped to build unity. This study focuses on only one of these techniques in one particular setting, and the purpose is to measure the perceived impact the Unity Task Force had on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Research Design

To assess the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, I used the exploratory, mixed-methods research design. I conducted semi-structured focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet and then used the themes and statements raised from the qualitative data of the focus group interviews to create a questionnaire to gather quantitative data from the West Ohio Conference delegates and

alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. I used the questionnaire to survey the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. I also used a researcher-designed, field-research journal to record notes and observations during Unity Task Force meetings and conference events and activities. After analyzing all the other data gathered, I conducted a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview of the resident bishop to gain his insights and correlate his observations to all other data gathered.

The qualitative instruments included (1) a researcher-designed, semi-structured focus group interview of members of the Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet, (2) open-ended questions (questions #5, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13) on the questionnaire administered by Survey Monkey, (3) a researcher-designed field journal, and (4) a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview of the resident bishop. The quantitative instrument surveyed members of the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences.

Exploratory, Mixed-Methods Design

The mixed-methods research design has increased in popularity as research methodology has evolved and developed in its use of both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, *Research Design* 203). Benefits of the mixed-methods design include (1) allowing a means for researchers “simultaneously [to] answer confirmatory and exploratory questions, and therefore to verify and generate theory in the same study” (Tashakkori and Teddye 15), (2) providing varying perspectives that broaden the dimension and scope of the project to give a “more complete picture of human behavior

and experience” (189), and (3) allowing the research “to develop as comprehensively and completely as possible” (195).

Research shows that certain procedures lead to the trustworthiness of mixed-methods designs. These procedures include (1) triangulation, (2) “clear detailing of methods of data collection and analysis” (Johnstone) to provide transparency of all aspects of the research and the ability to replicate the research, (3) reflexivity to facilitate transparency of methods, competing conclusions, and researcher’s presumptions, and (4) attention to negative cases so that evidence may be tracked and transparent and show how the researcher determines strategies to weigh conflicting evidence and judge which data is more or less reliable (Johnstone).

When researchers cannot find an existing instrument to study a particular phenomenon, they may use the exploratory, mixed-methods design (Creswell, *Educational Research* 561). This design allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon qualitatively, analyze the themes and ideas raised from it, and then create an instrument to evaluate quantitatively the phenomenon on a larger scale (561). The researcher then uses the quantitative data to build on or explain further the qualitative data originally gathered (561). T. P. Holland, R. P. Chait, and B. E. Taylor used such a design (435-53).

An advantage of the exploratory design includes using measures of the study grounded in data gathered from participants in the study rather than using a predetermined instrument or variables that may not specifically apply to the study. However, a disadvantage includes the extensive time needed to analyze the qualitative data to design the quantitative instrument, and then the time required to test the instrument (Creswell, *Educational Research* 561).

Quantitative

Researchers use surveys to gather people's individual opinions, evaluate programs, and identify important values and beliefs, and they use cross-sectional surveys to gather data at a specific point in time (Creswell, *Educational Research* 388-89). I chose to use a cross-sectional survey to gather data from a large group of people to examine and evaluate their perceived impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. I used the themes and ideas raised from the qualitative research of the focus groups to develop the quantitative questionnaire.

Qualitative

Believing that people have varying perceptions of the Unity Task Force, its impact, and significant events that have happened in the life of the West Ohio Conference, I chose to use qualitative research to dig deeper and explore underlying themes and ideas that might not become known through a quantitative survey only.

Focus groups. Researchers have used focus groups in nearly every field of study, and focus groups have become a standard tool in qualitative research (Barbour 10). I conducted two focus groups interviews: the Unity Task Force focus group interview and the Extended Cabinet focus group interview. In both of these groups, all or part of the members had been in their respective groups for several months or several years or more, and they were already comfortable with discussing and debating their diverse perspectives and opinions within their existing groups—as Rosaline Barbour notes is needed (3). I asked each group the same questions and observed their behavior, interaction with each other, and nonverbal cues during the interview (2-3). While marketing research texts regularly recommend not using existing groups in focus groups

(66), others argue that existing groups offer some advantages over groups of strangers brought together for the research, such as allowing the interviewer to observe group dynamics and interaction (67). For this research, interviewing the two existing groups gave me an opportunity to observe and evaluate their own unity within the group or lack thereof that may have been influenced by the Unity Task Force.

Participants in focus group interviews may be reluctant to share honestly their views, or they may tend to tell the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Barbour 34). However, because I am a member of the Unity Task Force and have a collegial relationship with the members of the Extended Cabinet, I did not expect either of these potential problems to be an issue. Some suggest that having an *insider* moderate a focus group might result in the insider taking for granted too many of the group's internal assumptions and then not be able to identify and scrutinize them accurately (50). Since a perfect match of an interviewer and a group will never be found, the researcher must take into account the possible impact of the interviewer on the data analysis (51).

Open-ended questions on the questionnaire. In addition to the closed-ended questions of the quantitative survey mentioned previously, I also included open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed me to probe deeper and the participants to answer the question in their own words, so I could explore other possibilities and insights than those presented in the quantitative survey questions (Creswell, *Educational Research* 398-99).

Unity field survey. My Unity Field Survey is based on participant observation. Researchers find participant observation helpful in various circumstances:

- the research problem is concerned with human meanings and interaction viewed from the insiders' perspective;

- the phenomenon of investigation is observable within an everyday life situation or setting;
- the researcher is able to gain access to an appropriate setting;
- the phenomenon is sufficiently limited in size and location to be studied as a case;
- study questions are appropriate for case study; and
- the research problem can be addressed by qualitative data gathered by direct observation and other means pertinent to the field setting (Jorgensen 13)

Danny L. Jorgensen points out the need for the participant observer not to disrupt or intrude on the regular interactions of the group (16). Since I am already an insider in the Unity Task Force and the West Ohio Conference, my presence did not disrupt regular interactions.

Fieldnotes, while helpful and crucial to observing human behavior and interactions, have limitations. Fieldnotes contain prose text recording observations, impressions, remembrances, feelings, and thoughts, but they often do not have a standard coding system or scale for grouping or trying to quantify the data. The great volume and looseness of the fieldnotes also contribute to the difficulty in trying to analyze and interpret the data. Because field notes record personal interactions with people, the field notes will likely not be balanced across all individuals because the researcher will likely not spend equal time with all persons observed. However, personal observation and the recording of field notes provide the following benefits: The researcher gets to know the subjects personally, so they are less likely to mistrust the researcher and distort their information; researchers observe behavior and people's lives over a period of time instead of just a cross-section of time; and, no quantitative survey can capture the "rich contextualization" a field researcher observes and records in the daily lives, behaviors, and conversations of the subjects (Sanjek 162-63).

My Unity Field Survey consists of notes I took at the various Unity Task Force, conference, and other meetings and events from 2005 to 2012, my file of the minutes and documents from the Unity Task Force meetings and events, and the notes I took as I observed related events or interactions that might contribute to this study.

Semi-structured interview. I wanted to learn Bishop Ough's insights and perspectives of the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. However, I feared his participation in the two focus group interviews of the Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet, of which he normally is a part, might influence the openness with which people shared. Therefore, I sought Bishop Ough's input in a personal, one-on-one interview. A one-on-one interview provides a means to interview participants who are articulate and willing to share their ideas (Creswell, *Educational Research* 226), and Bishop Ough certainly was able and willing.

Summary

Division within the Church hinders the unity and harms its mission to the world. The world struggles to see the One true God if those who profess to follow God are not one. Jesus prayed that believers would be one with him and each other so that the world may know God sent him (John 17:20-23). Paul compels believers to do everything they can to maintain their unity in the Spirit and to build up the unity of the body of Christ until all reach maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:3, 12-13). Thus, believers must take unity seriously and make every effort to maintain and attain it. Bishop Bruce Ough and the Unity Task Force of the West Ohio Conference took this task seriously, and for seven years (2005 to 2012) they worked to maintain and attain unity within their very theologically divided conference of the United Methodist Church. The purpose of this

study was to evaluate the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church by conducting focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet, by surveying the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and by interviewing the resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference.

To measure unity or the Unity Task Force's impact on the unity of the West Ohio Conference, one must first understand and find ways to measure biblical unity. Humans become one with God through the saving grace of and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When believers experience soteriological unity, they also experience functional unity. When believers become one in Christ and one with each other, they experience missional unity, unity in Christ's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, all believers of all ages will experience eschatological unity when Christ returns to fulfill and restore God's eternal kingdom.

While the Bible has commanded believers to maintain and attain unity in the body of Christ to enhance and further Christ's mission, the Bible does not call for unity at any cost. Throughout the Bible, God instructed believers not to maintain unity with false teachers, false prophets, or others who deny the risen Christ as Savior of the world but to separate themselves from them. For those who are not one with Christ cannot be one with those who are. However, when believers are one with Christ, they are also to be one with each other. They are not just to maintain civility and tolerate each other because people can tolerate each other and still hate each other, but God calls them to love each other and live in unity with each other.

When believers experience unity with Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit, they should exhibit behavior consistent with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), as well as kinship and koinonia described in the Old and New Testaments. The unity of believers in the Bible provides a description for what unity should look like in believers in all eras. Thus, by describing the signs of unity in a body of believers, one should be able to determine a relative level of unity they experience. This study focused on identifying signs of soteriological, functional, and missional unity within the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church to determine what, if any, impact the Unity Task Force and its varying methods to build unity had on the unity of the conference.

To assess the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, I used the exploratory, mixed-methods research design. I conducted semi-structured focus group interviews of members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet and then surveyed the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. I used the themes and statements raised from the qualitative data of the focus group interviews to create a questionnaire to gather quantitative data from the West Ohio Conference delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. I also used a researcher-designed field journal. Finally, a semi-structured interview with the resident bishop provided additional insights and information to help correlate all the data.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

Theological division hinders the unity and harms the mission of the Christian church. God calls believers to live in unity with God and each other so that the world may believe God sent Jesus and loved them as God loves Jesus (John 17:23). However, when members of the body of Christ fight each other and are not united, the world does not see and is not drawn to Christ. Therefore, the division harms the mission of calling others to unity with Christ and each other.

Bishop Ough formed the Unity Task Force to try to bring unity to the theologically divided West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church by conducting an exploratory, mixed-methods research design by interviewing or surveying members of the Unity Task Force, the Extended Cabinet, the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates of the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and the resident bishop.

Research Questions

Because the West Ohio Conference is large and diverse, the perspectives of different groups of people from throughout the conference were needed to get an accurate picture of the perceived impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the conference. At the same time, the degree of unity perceived may have varied among the different groups based on their level of contact with the Unity Task Force and its work. Similarly, the

perceived unity of the conference may have been related to certain key events within the life of the conference. Therefore, four key questions guided this research.

Research Question #1

How did members of the Unity Task Force view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The Unity Task Force focus group interview revealed qualitative data of how members of the Unity Task Force viewed the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. Observations from the unity field journal provided additional qualitative data.

Research Question #2

How did members of the Conference Extended Cabinet view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The Extended Cabinet focus group interview revealed qualitative data of how members of the Extended Cabinet viewed the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. Observations from the unity field journal provided additional qualitative data.

Research Question #3

How did the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The questions on the unity survey answered by the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional

conferences revealed quantitative data on how they viewed the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the conference (see Appendix H). Observations from the unity field journal and the open-ended questions (questions #5, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13) on the unity survey also provided qualitative data.

Research Question #4

How did significant events impact the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Open-ended question #13 on the unity survey revealed qualitative data of how the delegates and alternates to general and jurisdictional conference viewed the impact of significant events on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. Question 5 from the Unity Task Force focus group interview and Extended Cabinet focus group interview revealed qualitative data of the same. Observations from the unity field journal and comments from the bishop's interview also provided qualitative data.

Data gathered from the semi-structured interview with the resident bishop provided additional insights and perspectives that helped correlate all data gathered as it related to all four research questions.

Population and Participants

Four groups of persons from the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church participated in the research study. Group 1 participants included six of the fifteen members of the Unity Task Force in 2012. Participants included five clergy and one layperson, made up of five Caucasian and one African-American, four males and two females, and three members who had been part of the Unity Task Force since its inception.

Group 2 participants included the total population of the 2011 West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet. This team included the assistant to the bishop, eight district superintendents, and four additional conference directors. The group, not counting the bishop, included ten males and three females, twelve clergy and one layperson, twelve Caucasians and one African-American.

Group 3 participants included the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. Twenty-nine of the eligible eighty-four participants completed the survey (34.5 percent response rate). The persons who completed the survey included seventeen clergy (58.6 percent) and twelve laity (41.4 percent), eighteen males (62.1 percent) and eleven females (37.9 percent), twenty-six Caucasians (89.6 percent) and three African-Americans (10.3 percent).

The Group 4 participant was the resident bishop (a Caucasian male) of the West Ohio Conference from 2000 to 2012.

Table 3.1. Participant Groups in Study

Group	Participants
Group 1	West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force members
Group 2	West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet members
Group 3	West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 General and Jurisdictional Conferences
Group 4	Resident bishop of the West Ohio Conference

Table 3.2. Participants in Study

	Group 1: Unity Task Force	Group 2: Extended Cabinet	Group 3: Delegates and Alternates to 2008 and 2012 General and Jurisdictional Conferences	Group 4: Resident Bishop of the West Ohio Conference
N	6	13	29	1
Gender				
Male	4	10	18	1
Female	2	3	11	
Member Status				
Clergy	5	12	17	1
Laity	1	1	12	
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	5	12	26	1
African-American	1	1	3	

Design of the Study

To assess the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, I used the exploratory, mixed-methods research design. I conducted semi-structured focus group interviews with two populations: (1) members of the West Ohio Conference Unity Task Force and (2) members of the West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet. The West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences completed the unity survey. Themes and statements raised from the qualitative data of the focus group interviews provided the necessary information to create a questionnaire to gather quantitative data from the 2008 and 2012 West Ohio Conference delegates and alternates to general and jurisdictional conferences. A field

journal provided a place to record my participant observations. After analyzing all the other data gathered, I conducted a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview of the resident bishop to gain his insights and correlate his observations to all other data gathered.

The qualitative instruments included (1) a researcher-designed, semi-structured focus group interview of members of Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet, (2) open-ended question (questions #5, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13) on the unity survey administered by Survey Monkey, (3) a field journal, and (4) a semi-structured interview of the resident bishop. The quantitative instrument was a survey administered by Survey Monkey of West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences.

I used the following qualitative and quantitative measures:

1. Qualitative measure—Members of Unity Task Force and members of the Extended Cabinet participated in a researcher-designed, semi-structured focus group interview.
2. Qualitative measure—The West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences answered open-ended questions (questions #5, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13) in the researcher-designed survey.
3. Quantitative survey—The West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences participated in a researcher-designed questionnaire survey.

4. Qualitative measure—A researcher-designed field-researcher journal included observations from the Unity Task Force and conference meetings.

5. Qualitative measure—A semi-structured interview of the resident bishop provided additional insights and information to help correlate all the other data.

The timeline of the research proceeded as follows. I conducted the Unity Task Force focus group interview on 21 May 2012, and the Extended Cabinet focus group interview on 9 May 2012. Analysis of the qualitative data from the focus group interviews and development of the unity survey took place between 19 June to 11 July 2012. On 31 July 2012, I e-mailed to the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences an invitation to complete the unity survey on Survey Monkey by 14 August 2012. I mailed the letter to one person who did not have an e-mail address. The unity field journal recorded observations of various Unity Task Force and West Ohio Conference gatherings and events from July 2005 to June 2012. On 22 August 2012, I conducted the semi-structured interview of the resident bishop.

To assess the impact of the Unity Task Force using only qualitative research on a large number of people would not have been possible due to the significant amount of time required for those interviews and their analysis. Similarly, because I could not find an existing quantitative instrument to use for this study, I chose to use the exploratory, mixed-methods research design. This method allowed me to conduct qualitative research first through two focus group interviews, and then after analyzing the data, use the ideas and themes that emerged to design a quantitative questionnaire that could be used to

survey a larger number of people and evaluate the phenomenon on a larger scale (Creswell, *Educational Research* 561).

Qualitative Research Design

The five steps for qualitative research collection include (1) identifying participants and sites where the interviews will take place, (2) gaining permission and access to conduct the research, (3) deciding the types of data to be collected, (4) designing the forms to collect the data, and (5) conducting the research ethically (Creswell, *Educational Research* 212).

Since the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize to a larger population but to explore in depth a particular phenomenon (Creswell, *Educational Research* 213), I used purposeful sampling to select the groups that would be “information rich” (214) to study the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference. I used the “theory or concept sampling” strategy to discover specific ideas and concepts and to develop a theory of how the Unity Task Force impacted the soteriological, functional, and missional unity of the two populations (216). Since part of the intent of creating the Unity Task Force was to create unity within the task force (an intentionally theologically diverse group) that would then extend to the West Ohio Conference, I chose to study the Unity Task Force’s perception of unity in the conference and the unity within the group itself. I also chose to study the Extended Cabinet (an intentionally theologically diverse group of leaders) that has existed since before the Unity Task Force formed and began its work. Both interviews took place at the West Ohio Conference office in Worthington, Ohio, because that is where both groups regularly meet.

Bishop Ough of the West Ohio Conference, Patty Wagner (chair of the Unity Task Force), Randy Stearns (dean of the Extended Cabinet), and the individual members of the Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet granted permission to conduct the research.

For the focus group interviews, I used a semi-structured, focus group protocol (see Appendix I), made audio recordings and transcribed them, and took notes during the interviews. For the field researcher journal, I kept notes as a participant observer at Unity Task Force meetings and gatherings, as well as various West Ohio Conference events and activities from 2005 to 2012. The quantitative survey designed from the qualitative analysis and conducted electronically by Survey Monkey also included open-ended questions. After analyzing all the other data, I conducted a semi-structured interview of the resident bishop to gain his insights and to correlate all the other data. The focus group interviews, semi-structured interview, and survey followed the ethical procedures outlined in Asbury Theological Seminary's "Human Subjects Review Policy" and Creswell's *Educational Research* (159).

Quantitative Research Design

The five steps for quantitative research collection include (1) selecting the participants, (2) gaining permission to conduct the research, (3) deciding the types of data to be collected, (4) developing an instrument to collect the data, and (5) analyzing the data (Creswell, *Educational Research* 180).

To try to assess the perceived impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference, I chose not to conduct a random sampling of the lay and clergy members of the West Ohio Conference. Because many of the lay members change from

year to year and because some attend annual conference only once or did not attend prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force, many of the lay members may not have had a long-term view or any perception of the impact of the Unity Task Force on the conference's unity. Attempting to find such a random and diverse group of lay members with long-term conference experience would have been difficult and required a great deal of time and effort. Therefore, I used convenience sampling (Creswell, *Educational Research* 155) and surveyed the population of the 2008 and 2012 West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates. While all the lay members in the delegations had not had long-term experience with the West Ohio Annual Conference and the Unity Task Force, 93 percent of those who completed the unity survey indicated they attended the West Ohio Annual Conference in 2004 or before.

The total population of the 2008 and 2012 West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to general and jurisdictional conferences included sixty-four persons in 2008 and fifty-six persons in 2012, with a diversity of ages, races, and theological perspectives. After removing from the pool of delegates and alternates, the delegates who died or are no longer members of the West Ohio Conference, the duplicated names, my dissertation mentor, and myself, I surveyed the remaining eighty-four delegates. Prior to conducting the research, Bishop Ough granted permission for the project, and prior to completing the survey, each participant completed an informed consent.

Instrumentation

To assess the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference, I conducted an exploratory, mixed-methods research design consisting of

four qualitative and one quantitative instrument. The qualitative instruments included (1) a researcher-designed semi-structured focus group interview of two populations—the Unity Task Force Focus Group interview and the Extended Cabinet Focus Group interview, (2) open-ended questions on the quantitative survey, (3) a field researcher journal (unity field journal), and (4) a semi-structured interview of the resident bishop (bishop interview). After analyzing the themes and ideas from the focus group interviews, I designed the quantitative instrument (unity survey; see Appendix H), a researcher-designed questionnaire facilitated by Survey Monkey to survey the West Ohio Conference 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conference delegates and alternates. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) on the unity survey allowed participants to quantify their perspective or to mark an optional “Do not know” response included in each question. Some of the questions used a different five-point Likert scale (1 = None, 2 = Little, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Strong, 5 = Very Strong). Open-ended questions on the questionnaire allowed participants to provide additional feedback to give insight into the underlying issues and unity of the annual conference.

Observations at various Unity Task Force and conference meetings and events were recorded in the unity field journal. I also recorded signs or changing dynamics of unity as people related to one another at meetings and events.

After analyzing all the other data gathered, I conducted a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview of the resident bishop to gain his insights and correlate his observations to all other data gathered.

The Unity Task Force focus group interview addressed research question 1. The Extended Cabinet focus group interview addressed research question 2. The unity survey addressed research question 3. Information from all the instruments related to research question 4.

Expert Review and Standardized Measures

After analyzing the ideas and themes raised from the Unity Task Force focus group interview and the Extended Cabinet focus group interview, I developed questions for the unity survey to quantify the degree of perceived unity or lack thereof in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church and the level of perceived impact the Unity Task Force had on it. After preparing the instrument, three persons conducted an expert review on the survey. The expert reviewers included (1) a seminary professor of leadership who was a member of the West Ohio Annual Conference and familiar with the Unity Task Force and related issues in conference, (2) a retired provost from a community college who continues to serve on dissertation committees for Ohio University, College of Education, and (3) an assistant professor of psychology at Asbury University who received a minor in statistics at The Ohio State University and helps many doctoral students in the statistical analysis of data. I made the changes suggested by the expert reviewers (see Appendix J).

Variables

The quantitative portion of the mixed-methods design study evaluated the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference as perceived by each group. To account for various intervening variables, participants recorded basic

demographic information (e.g., age, gender, theological perspective, and years participated at the West Ohio annual conference) in the survey.

If the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates of the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences did not complete the survey, I used only the data from the responses received. If members of the Unity Task Force or Extended Cabinet did not want to participate in the focus group interviews, I only interviewed those who were willing.

To try to eliminate various intervening variables of the qualitative portion of the mixed-design study, I used consistent procedures throughout the study, including a preset list of questions, prompts, and structure for each focus group interview (see Appendix I).

Reliability and Validity

Appropriate methods result in reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of the measures taken, and validity refers to how well the researcher measured the data sought (Lowe).

Reliability. To ensure reliability, I used consistent procedures for the focus group interviews, followed the steps outlined, conducted the research ethically, had experts review the questionnaire to make sure the questions were clear and unambiguous (Creswell, *Educational Research* 169), and followed their suggestions. I also tested the validity of the questionnaire by evaluating internal consistency, assessing the consistency of participants' responses throughout the instrument (171).

Validity. To ensure validity, consistent procedures were used for the focus group interviews (see Appendix I). I asked the expert reviewers to assess the questionnaire's validity by reviewing it for content validity, meaning the questions accurately represented

all possibilities of the area of study, criterion-related validity, meaning the scores of the questions relate well to the outcome, and construct validity, meaning the scores obtained will accurately measure the information sought in the research questions and can be generalized, as outlined by Creswell (*Educational Research* 172). I made the suggested changes of the expert reviewers.

Data Collection

Data collection from the semi-structured focus group interviews, the unity survey, and the bishop interview occurred between 9 May 2012 and 22 August 2012. Data collection for the unity field journal occurred from July 2005 to June 2012.

On 20 April 2012, I e-mailed Bishop Ough to explain the project and obtain his permission to conduct all the research and received e-mail confirmation from him on 20 April 2012. I e-mailed on 20 April 2012 the chairs of the Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet to explain the research and to obtain their permission to conduct the focus group interviews. They sent e-mail confirmation of their approval on 8 May and 21 April 2012.

I conducted the Unity Task Force focus group interview on 21 May 2012, and the Extended Cabinet focus group interview on 9 May 2012. The Focus Group Interview Protocol guided the interviews, and both interviews took place at the West Ohio Conference office in Worthington, Ohio (see Appendix I). In addition to making an audio recording of both interviews and transcribing them, I also took notes during the interviews.

Data analysis of the qualitative data from the focus group interviews and development of the unity survey occurred from 19 June to 11 July 2012. On 18 July 2012, the expert reviewers received from me the draft unity survey; they reviewed it and

replied with their feedback and suggestions. I incorporated their suggestions and finalized the unity survey on 30 July 2012 (see Appendix J).

On 31 July 2012, I e-mailed to the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences an invitation to complete the unity survey on Survey Monkey by 14 August 2012. Data analysis of the unity survey took place from 16 August to 3 September 2012. In the unity field journal, I recorded observations of various Unity Task Force and West Ohio Conference gatherings and events from July 2005 to June 2012.

From 15 August to 21 August 2012, analysis occurred of all the data gathered thus far. After conducting an initial assessment of the data, I prepared a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol for the bishop's interview to seek additional information, clarification, and correlation of data previously collected (see Appendix K). On 22 August 2012, I conducted the semi-structured interview of the resident bishop. From 22 August to 3 September 2012, data gathered from the interview was analyzed and correlated with all the other data.

All the electronic data was securely stored on my password-protected personal laptop computer and backed-up to my Dropbox account, a secure and password-protected online storage provider. During the active phase of research, I kept all physical documents to the research in a secure location in my home office. After completing the data collection and analysis, I moved the materials to a locked file cabinet in my locked office at the church where I served.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the Unity Task Force focus group interview and Extended Cabinet focus group interview, I transcribed the interviews and read the transcriptions and my notes from each interview to get a general sense of the conversations. Microsoft Word facilitated coding the text, grouping similar codes, and making a chart to determine themes that emerged and insights gained. This data analysis provided the information needed to prepare the unity survey.

Descriptive and simple statistics facilitated the evaluation of results of the quantitative data of the unity survey and the comparison of responses of the different groups. For the questions using the Likert scale, I calculated and compared the mean score for each question, the grand mean for all subjects for each question, and the final mean score for all questions of the instrument. Additional evaluation included *t*-tests and analyses of variance.

To analyze the data from the open-ended questions on the unity survey, I read all the responses to get a general sense of the data. Microsoft Word facilitated coding of the text, grouping similar codes, and making a chart to determine themes that emerged and insights gained. I then correlated that information to the responses from the survey.

To analyze the data from the unity field journal, I read and summarized observations. Microsoft Word facilitated coding of the text and grouping similar codes to determine themes that emerged and insights gained. I correlated that information to all the other data.

All the other data gathered provided the necessary information to design the bishop interview. After conducting the interview, I transcribed it and read the

transcription and my notes to get a general sense of the conversation. Microsoft Word facilitated coding of the text and grouping similar codes to determine themes that emerged and insights gained. I then correlated that information with all the other data.

Ethical Procedures

Prior to participating in the study, each participant read and signed (either on Survey Monkey for the unity survey or in print for the focus group interviews) an informed consent form. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned a letter to each participant in the focus group interviews and avoided using descriptors that would identify the participants. The only one who knew the identity of each person, I kept that information on my password-protected computer that remained secure in my locked home or church office or locked car during transport. For the unity survey, participants shared all information anonymously to maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Information disseminated contained only aggregates and themes but not any information that could be used to identify the participants.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

For centuries, theological division among believers had hindered the unity and harmed the mission of the Christian church. God calls believers to live in unity with God and each other so the world may see God in them and their unity. However, their continued divisions and rancor among them prevent the world from seeing, and being drawn to, Christ in them.

In the midst of the intense theological division of the West Ohio Conference, Bishop Bruce Ough formed the Unity Task Force to try to bring unity to the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the perceived impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the conference. An exploratory, mixed-methods research design facilitated the process of interviewing or surveying members of the Unity Task Force, the Extended Cabinet, the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates of the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and the resident bishop.

Participants

Four groups of persons from the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church participated in the research study. In 2012, the Unity Task Force included the resident bishop of the West Ohio Area and fifteen adult clergy and laypersons of the West Ohio Conference representing gender, theological, and ethnic diversity. The group, not counting the bishop, included eight males and seven females, twelve clergy and three laity, fourteen Caucasians and one African-American. Some members had been part of

the Unity Task Force since its inception in 2005; since that time, some had resigned and others joined in 2010. Group 1 participants in the focus group interview included six members of the Unity Task Force. Participants included five clergy and one layperson; five Caucasians and one African-American; four males and two females, and three members who had been part of the Unity Task Force since its inception.

Group 2 participants included the total population of the 2011 West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet. This team included the assistant to the bishop, eight district superintendents, and four additional conference directors, one of whom was the conference treasurer and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) elected in 2010. The group, not counting the bishop, included ten males and three females, twelve clergy and one layperson, and twelve Caucasians and one African-American. All twelve members of the extended cabinet participated in the focus group interview.

Group 3 participants included the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences. Twenty-nine of the eligible eighty-four participants completed the survey (34.5 percent response rate). The persons who completed the survey included seventeen clergy (58.6 percent) and twelve laity (41.4 percent), with eighteen males (62.1 percent) and eleven females (37.9 percent). Of those who responded, twenty-five were married (86.2 percent), were single two (6.8 percent), one was divorced (3.4 percent), and one was widowed (3.4 percent). The sample largely was Caucasian ($n = 26$, 89.6 percent), with three African-American participants (10.3 percent). Nearly all participants indicated that they both publically and privately identify as having a heterosexual orientation ($n = 27$, 93.1 percent); two did not answer this question ($n = 2$, 6.9 percent). The participants averaged 55 years in age ($SD =$

11.81), ranging from 25 to 74, with thirty years in the West Ohio Conference, and the clergy averaged twenty-nine years in ministry (ranging from one to sixty-nine; see Figure 4.1).

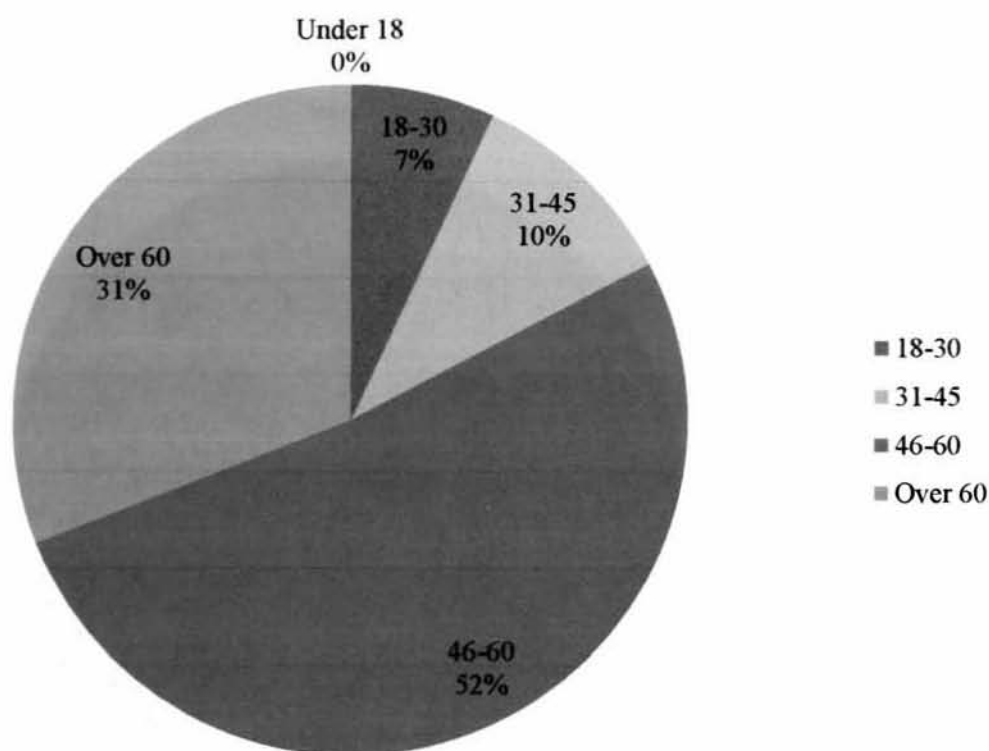


Figure 4.1. Ages of unity survey participants (N=29).

In addition, a slight majority of the sample was clergy ($n = 17$, 58.6 percent), with twelve lay members (41.4 percent). The clergy, on average, had been in the ministry for 28.94 years ($SD = 14.98$; with a range of one to sixty-nine); whereas, the whole sample, clergy and laity, had been in the West Ohio Conference for a mean of 30.17 years ($SD = 12.83$; with a range of four to forty-eight). The majority had not been members of the West Ohio Conference's Unity Task Force ($n = 27$, 93.1 percent). Theologically, the

majority described themselves as very conservative (n = 3, 10.3 percent) or more conservative (n = 13, 44.8 percent), whereas very few claimed to be very liberal (n = 1, 3.4 percent) or more liberal (n = 6, 20.7 percent). Six described themselves as moderate (20.7 percent; Figure 4.2).

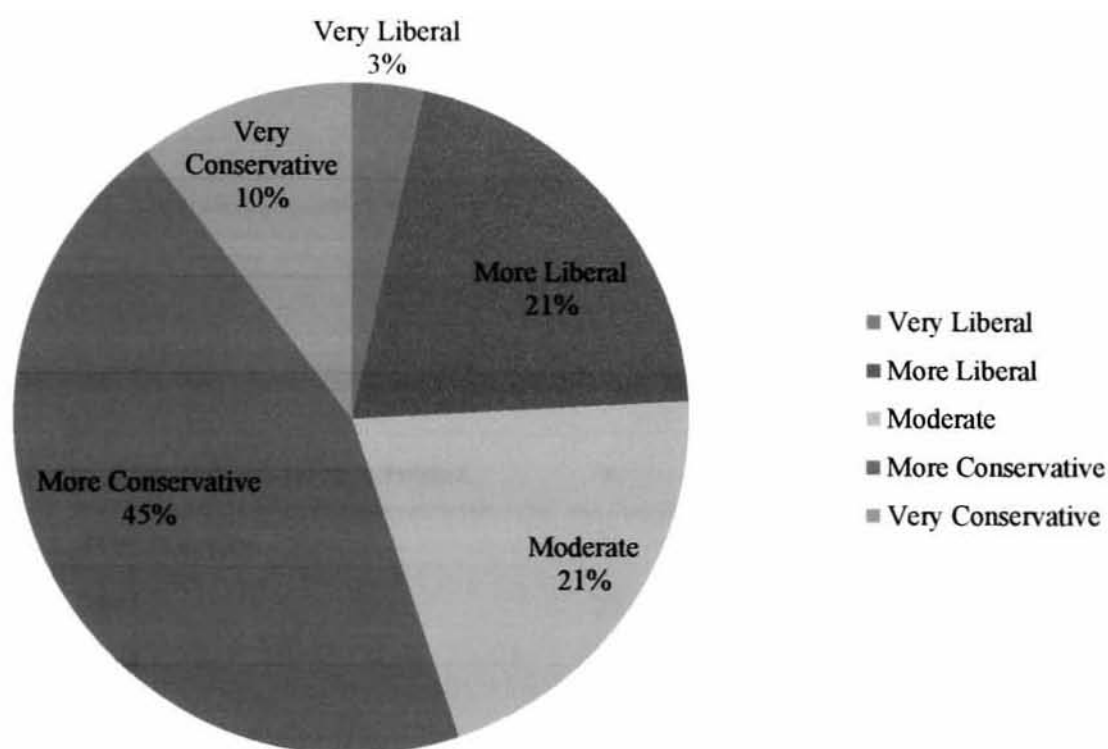


Figure 4.2. Theological identity of unity survey participants (N=29).

Nine participants (36.0 percent) attended the 2008 general conference; eighteen (72.0 percent) the 2008 jurisdictional conference; fifteen (60.0 percent) the 2012 general conference; and eighteen (72.0 percent), the 2012 jurisdictional conference (see Table 4.1). At least 72.0 percent attended the West Ohio annual conference in each of the years

between 2005 and 2012, and 93.1 percent indicated they had attended annual conference in 2004 or before (Table 4.2).

Table 4.1. General and Jurisdictional Conferences Attended by Participants (N=29)

Conference Attended	n	%
2008 General conference	9	36.0
2008 Jurisdictional conference	18	72.0
2012 General conference	15	60.0
2012 Jurisdictional conference	18	72.0

Table 4.2. Annual Conferences Attended by Participants (N=29)

Annual Conference Attended	n	%
2004 or before	27	93.1
2005	22	75.9
2006	21	72.4
2007	22	75.9
2008	21	72.4
2009	23	79.3
2010	21	72.4
2011	21	72.4
2012	21	72.4

The Group 4 participants included the resident bishop (a Caucasian male) of the West Ohio Conference from 2000 to 2012.

Research Question #1

The first research question was, “How did members of the Unity Task Force view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?” When asked in the focus group interview what impact the Unity Task Force had on the unity of the conference, the task force members mentioned the building of community and or relationships—among their group and by modeling and encouraging others in the conference to do the same (sixteen times) and in creating or enhancing a culture of civility that led to more civil conversations among members of the conference (ten times; see Table 4.3). Minor themes included leadership and guidance in administering difficult conversations, decisions, and election (mentioned six times) and symbolic leadership or modeling of unity, civil conversations, and community among theologically diverse persons (mentioned four times; see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Unity Task Force Members’ View of Unity Task Force’s Impact on the Overall Unity of the West Ohio Conference

Themes	Times Mentioned
Major themes:	
Built community and/or relationships	16
Produced more civil conversations	10
Minor themes:	
Provided leadership and guidance in administering difficult conversations, decisions, and elections	6
Provided symbolic leadership	4

Members of the Unity Task Force identified signs of the increased unity within the conference. A sign of soteriological unity is that some persons better reflect the fruit

of the Spirit. However, they also noted that any increase in soteriological unity as a result of the task force likely happened only among those who participated on the task force. As a sign of functional unity, task force members identified a stronger sense of community among persons of differing theological views and more civil conversations. The stronger sense of community *humanizes* people with differences, narrows the trust gap, increases people's commitment to stay at the table, melts dividing lines, and results in a growing love and respect for one another. The more civil conversations were demonstrated by people not just tolerating but entering into true dialogue with one another and respecting one another even when they disagreed. Signs of increased missional unity included legislation that was proposed by persons of differing theological perspectives and greater *across the board support* for conference mission projects and initiatives.

The members of the task force noted that significant events had positively and negatively impacted the unity of the conference. Being in ministry and mission together through conference-wide miracle offerings (especially the most recent "Wings of the Morning" mission aviation project) positively impacted the perceived unity of the conference. However, the nomination and the election (by a difference of eight votes) of an openly homosexual conference treasurer revealed the very real division that existed within the conference. Some viewed his election and the bishop's involvement in the process as signs of increasing unity, but others saw the whole event as a watershed moment that undid the previous good work that the bishop and task force had done.

While members of the task force believed the group, in its seven years of existence, had positively impacted the unity of the conference, they spent a significant amount of time lamenting their disappointments and regrets. At least part of the

reflections and regrets of unfinished business may have been due to the timing of the interview—immediately following what may have been their final meeting, depending on what the new bishop will want. Task force members regretted that they could not attempt to address the many areas of disunity within the conference and that the work would never be finished. They expressed disappointment that their sincere efforts to provide a civil process to handle the nomination of a homosexual conference treasurer came up short, leaving persons on each end of the theological spectrum, as well as people in the middle, feeling disenfranchised. Ultimately, they believed that process undermined their credibility within the conference.

Task force members also expressed disappointment that while conversation within the annual conference had become more civil, many, including those around the task force table, felt they could not be entirely open and honest with one another because they could never bridge the deep disagreement of the underlying and core issues of the denomination's stance on homosexuality. In the earlier years of the Unity Task Force (prior to the election of a homosexual conference CFO in 2010), members seemed more open in their discussions because they had developed a level of unity through their intentional and extended times of relationship building. However, when new members joined the task force the end of 2009 (and not long before the CFO election), the group did not take much time to build relationships, and, as a result experienced little unity with the new members. In addition, some of the newer members tended to have a utopian view of unity (viewing unity as uniformity where everyone agreed with their perspectives) and spoke condescendingly or verbally attacked others who did not agree. Consequently,

these dynamics often shut down communication because no one wanted to fight back or be attacked.

Despite their disappointments, one member said the unity task force had made a positive impact:

I think the minimum [the Unity Task Force] has done, and the minimum is to think a very positive thing, that simply saying there is a task force for unity is a reminder to the conference on a regular basis that unity is important. And I think if you talk about that in family and in church family, wherever you say unity is important, it makes a statement.

While the task force lamented their disappointments and unfilled hopes, they hoped and believed their presence as a Unity Task Force had at least been a reminder to the conference of the importance of unity.

When asked about the Unity Task Force's perception of the impact the task force had on the unity of the conference, Bishop Ough agreed with their assessment. He expected the group would express a sense of disappointment or frustration that their work remained unfinished and that many of their early positive gains (in the sense of unity) "were wiped out" with the significant event of the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO. In hindsight, Bishop Ough acknowledged that the time when he tried to expand the membership of the Unity Task Force was just prior to that event, and the group never had an opportunity to build relationships and "experience moments of vulnerability and spiritual connection that the early task force had." Bishop Ough had always hoped that the relationships and trust built around the table of the Unity Task Force would be replicated in other settings. However, as he admitted, doing so would be very difficult because of the great deal of time and trust required, as well as a fundamental spoken or unspoken covenant to stay at the table.

Research Question #2

The second research question was, “How did members of the Conference Extended Cabinet view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?” While the Extended Cabinet identified signs of increased unity within the conference, they proposed that the increase in unity could not be attributed to the Unity Task Force itself but to an entire systemic change led by Bishop Ough. The Unity Task Force, they said, was one of just many parts in the bishop’s overall efforts to bring unity to the conference. Other factors included the bishop, first and foremost, raising the focus on mission over people’s differences, integrating values of and working toward unity in the cabinet and other groups within the conference, recruiting leaders who model and work for unity, and raising awareness that people are to live together in covenant community, not off in their own silos.

When asked in the focus group interview about the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the conference, the Extended Cabinet members mentioned facilitating and moving the conversation along so people could have open and civil dialogue (fifteen times), starting the relationship processes of building community and a sense of respect and collegiality (thirteen times), and providing symbolic leadership for the conference (thirteen times) by modeling and visually demonstrating unity amidst diversity, civil conversation, and joint efforts in mission and legislation. The other major theme (mentioned eleven times) was, as mentioned previously, that the Unity Task Force was only one piece of a whole system that was working towards unity (Table 4.4). Minor themes included raising awareness of and providing tools of civil conversation so individuals or groups would self-correct when conversations became less than civil

(seven times) and providing leadership and guidance for the conference in administering difficult conversations, decisions, and elections (five times; see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Extended Cabinet's View of Unity Task Force's Impact on the Unity of the West Ohio Conference

Themes	Times Mentioned
Major themes:	
Produced more civil conversations	15
Built community and/or relationships	13
Provided symbolic leadership	13
Unity Task Force was part of a systemic change	11
Minor themes:	
Raised awareness of and provided tools of civil conversation so people could self-correct	7
Provided leadership and guidance in administering difficult conversations, decisions, and elections	5

The Extended Cabinet did not identify any signs of increased soteriological unity within the conference as a result of the work of the Unity Task Force, though they said the members of the task force may have experienced some soteriological unity among themselves. For signs of increased functional unity, the Extended Cabinet identified a stronger sense of community among persons of differing theological perspectives, caring for one another, and praying for one other, especially as they have spent many hours together in their group. While not attributing an increase in missional unity to the Unity Task Force, they did identify missional legislation proposed by persons of differing theological perspectives as a sign of increased missional unity within the conference.

Members of the Extended Cabinet noted that significant events had positively and negatively impacted the sense of unity in the conference. They noted that worship at annual conference, being in ministry and mission together through conference-wide miracle offerings, especially the most recent “Wings of the Morning” project and global partnerships), and the bishop’s yearly episcopal address with a missional framework positively impacted the perceived unity of the conference. However, the nomination and election of a homosexual conference treasurer, the election of delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences and the division that comes with it, and General Conference and the continued disagreement of the denomination’s stance on homosexuality had all negatively impacted the sense of unity within the conference.

While the Extended Cabinet members clearly and repeatedly suggested that the Unity Task Force was only one part of the bishop’s entire systemic process to try to bring a greater sense of unity to the West Ohio Conference, some members acknowledged that they would hate to see where the conference would be without the Unity Task Force and that the task force is just a first step to many successive steps that are needed to take the conference into deeper and broader conversations. One member suggested that the task force challenges their “theological scruples” of being committed to living in unity while living with significant differences. Another member added, “Sometimes I’m happy that something can make a few degrees of difference. And sometimes, a few degrees [are] all you need to make a significant difference so we can move on missionally.” Although the extended cabinet members did not believe the unity task force made a significant positive impact on the conference unity, they did believe it made a slight positive impact.

Because the members of the Extended Cabinet spend nearly all of their time trying to align everything (program, appointments, and everything they do) around the mission of the church, Bishop Ough expected this group to have a much stronger focus on missional unity, as evidenced by their responses. He also indicated that the large amount of time they spend together over a long period has enabled them to build a great deal of trust for one another in the midst of their differences. Bishop Ough stated that the analysis of this interview confirms his fundamental belief that staying focused on Christ's mission is a very powerful unifying force.

Research Question #3

The third research question was, "How did the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences view the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?"

Sense of Unity and Disunity

Means and standard deviations were computed for the four items assessing unity before (pre-2005) and after (2012) the work of the Unity Task Force in the West Ohio Conference (see Table 4.5). The mean responses for the sense of unity prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force fell in the range of little to moderate unity ($M = 2.17$; $SD = 0.57$); in contrast, the mean responses for a sense of disunity ranged between moderate and strong ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.88$). A series paired-samples t-tests showed that sense of unity became slightly more positive from the past ($M = 2.17$; $SD = 0.57$) to the present ($M = 2.52$; $SD = 0.51$; $t [28] = -6.04$; $p < .001$). In addition, the sense of disunity became significantly less intense from the past ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.88$) to present, ($M =$

3.83; SD = 0.76; t [23] = -7.32; $p < .001$). Reversing these scales so that low numbers on the disunity scale scored in same direction as the unity scale (i.e., with low numbers suggesting negative sense), the sense of disunity ($M = 2.17$; SD = 0.76) in 2012 was weaker than the lack of a sense of unity ($M = 2.52$; SD = 0.51; t [28] = 3.36; $p = .002$). However, both the sense of disunity ($M = 1.92$; SD = 0.88) and the lack of a sense of unity ($M = 2.17$, SD = 0.57) were equally negative in the past (t [28] = 3.36; $p = .002$).

Table 4.5. Means and Standard Deviations for Unity in the West Ohio Conference

	Past (pre-2005) M (SD) n = 24	Present (2012) M (SD) n = 29	t (df)	p
Sense of unity	2.17 (0.57)	2.52 (0.51)	-6.04 (28)	.000**
Sense of disunity	4.08 (0.88)	3.83 (0.76)	-7.32 (24)	.000**

** = $p < .01$

The significant disunity in the conference came through not only in the quantitative data but also in the qualitative data. The sheer volume of words participants used as calculated by Microsoft Word, to describe signs of disunity in the conference prior to (1081 words) and after (1504 words) the formation of the Unity Task Force, are nearly double the number of words used to describe signs of unity prior to (545 words—and two of those words were *none*) and after (798 words) the formation of the Unity Task Force (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Number of Words Describing Unity and Disunity in the West Ohio Conference

	Past (No. of Words)	Current (No. of Words)
Signs of unity	545	798
Signs of disunity	1081	1504

For signs of unity in the West Ohio Conference prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force, major themes (both mentioned five times) included episcopal leadership (of both former Bishop Craig and Bishop Ough) and common mission. Minor themes (both mentioned three times) included communication (meaningful dialogue) and worship at annual conference. Though signs of unity were sought in question 6, several persons still mentioned signs of disunity (distrust and lack of unity). A participant who was a teenager during the period prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force felt a strong sense of political unity, but in a negative sense. The strong political unity, according to this young person, caused people to feel like outsiders. However, someone who had a different theological perspective showed great love and communion for this person—not because of any “conference work,” but because of their mutual experience in a youth retreat (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. Signs of Unity Prior to the Formation of the Unity Task Force (Q6)

Themes	Times Mentioned (N = 24)
Major themes:	
Episcopal leadership	5
Common mission	5
Minor themes:	
Communication (meaningful dialogue)	3
Worship at annual conference	3

Overwhelmingly, the major sign of unity mentioned after the formation of the Unity Task Force was missional unity, having a common mission (mentioned sixteen times). Missional unity expressed by participants included the annual conference miracle offerings, working together in missional commitments outside the conference, an increase in church partnerships, and one person mentioned making disciples of Jesus Christ. Another person responded that if theology is kept “off the table” and people focus on the need to be addressed, they rise above their theological differences. Other minor themes that emerged (see Table 4.8) included having a common vision (five times), working together with people across the theological divide (five times), more civil and less hateful communication (three times), and a less rancorous process for electing delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences (three times). One person suggested that the conference has a veneer of unity; people use a common language that allows them to exhibit outward signs of soteriological and missional unity, but they do not agree on the meaning of the language or on the expected result of using the same language. Another

person suggested that the unity in the conference is no better and perhaps worse than prior to when the Unity Task Force began its work (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8. Signs of Unity after the Formation of the Unity Task Force (Q7)

Themes	Times Mentioned (N = 28)
Major themes:	
Common mission	16
Minor themes:	
Common vision	5
Working together	5
Communication (more civil)	3
Election process less rancorous	3

The top two major signs of disunity in the conference prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force included hate-filled communication and homosexual issues (both mentioned ten times). Participants described the hate-filled communication as name-calling, verbal attacks, angry or hate-filled speeches, demonizing opponents, calling people haters and cheaters, and talking behind people's backs instead of to them. Another significant major theme of disunity was distrust (mentioned eight times) during the election process, in every level of leadership, between the different political *camps*, and between *insiders* and *outsiders*. Another major theme (mentioned six times) referred to the extremely bitter and divisive elections of general and jurisdictional conference delegates (see Table 4.9).

Three minor themes of disunity in the conference prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force were all mentioned five times and included a continued focus on divisive issues (e.g., human sexuality, human rights, abortion, war) that resulted in winners and losers, theological division, and extreme polarization resulting in an *us and them* atmosphere, especially between the liberal and conservative camps. Other minor themes (that were mentioned three times each) included racism and persons having non-holistic views of others—looking only at what the person believed about one issue and not the person’s skills, gifts, or leadership abilities (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Signs of Disunity Prior to the Formation of the Unity Task Force (Q5)

Themes	Times Mentioned (N = 27)
Major themes:	
Communication (hate-filled)	10
Homosexual issues	10
Distrust	8
Election process (bitter, divisive)	6
Minor themes:	
Continued focus on divisive issues	5
Theological division	5
Extreme polarization (sense of “us and them”)	5
Non-holistic view of persons	3
Racism	3

The major signs of disunity in the conference after the formation of the Unity Task Force included communication or lack thereof (mentioned eleven times), the

nomination and election of a homosexual conference treasurer and Chief Financial Officer (ten times), and distrust (eight times). While communication may be more civil than previously, participants thought the conference's current use of Roberts' Rules of Order and other procedures, including some proposed by the Unity Task Force, actually shut down communication, rather than helping it. As a result, more conversations occur privately (also a result of the mistrust in the conference) and conversations about controversial issues are simply avoided. One person suggested that the 2012 delegation to general and jurisdictional conference reached a functional unity by simply avoiding the most controversial issues. Others noted that the conference exhibits a "polite unity," a false sense of peace, or an act of going through the external motions of unity, but the "fruit of unity" is scarce when dealing with issues on which they do not agree (see Table 4.10).

Participants specifically named ten times the nomination and election of a homosexual CFO. However, when combined with other themes that directly related to the same issue (homosexual issues, five; withholding of apportionments because of the election, four; and churches/people leaving the conference and denomination as a result of the CFO election, three), the number of times mentioned jumped to twenty-two, making it the major theme that stands out above the rest. The large number of comments relating to the election of a homosexual CFO might partly be due to the timing of the survey—two years after the election and while some congregations are still withholding apportionments or withdrawing from the conference. The final major theme cited was distrust (eight times) in the election of delegates, in the conference leadership, in the each

other's intentions (i.e., looking for people's hidden agendas), in the denomination, and between liberals and evangelicals (see Table 4.10).

Minor signs of disunity in the conference after the formation of the Unity Task Force included theological division (mentioned five times), homosexual issues (four times), churches withholding apportionments as a sign of protest to the election of a homosexual CFO (four times), the process of electing delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences (four times), disappointment in or distrust of episcopal leadership (four times), churches and people leaving the conference and denomination because of the election of a homosexual CFO (three times), and continued focus on divisive issues (three times). As mentioned previously, many of these are interrelated with the major theme of the nomination and election of the homosexual conference CFO (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10. Signs of Disunity after the Formation of the Unity Task Force (Q8)

Themes	Times Mentioned (N = 26)
Major themes:	
Communication (or lack thereof)	11
Nomination and election of homosexual conference CFO	10
Distrust	8
Minor themes:	
Theological division	5
Homosexual issues	5
Withholding of apportionments	4
Election process	4
Episcopal leadership	4
Churches/People leaving conference/denomination	3
Continued focus on divisive issues	3

Sense of Unity Following the Unity Task Force

Despite the slight increase in the sense of unity found prior to (question 3) and after (question 1) the formation of the Unity Task Force, the qualitative data revealed little, if any, increase in the sense of unity, and if an increase occurred, it likely came only at a superficial level. When asked directly (question 9) if the unity in the West Ohio Conference had increased since the Unity Task Force began its work in 2005, participants answered, “Neither Agree or Disagree” ($M = 2.96$; $SD = 1.11$). Similarly, when asked if any increase in the sense of unity could be attributed to the Unity Task Force (question 10), the participants answered “Neither Agree or Disagree” ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 1.04$). Question 11 revealed a somewhat positive response ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 0.92$; $t [20] = 2.91$;

$p = .009$) that participants felt factors other than the Unity Task Force contributed to any additional sense of unity (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11. Means and Standard Deviations for Unity after the Unity Task Force

Survey Question	M (SD)	t (df) ^{a,b}	p
General sense of unity ($n = 21$)	2.98 (1.04)	-2.91 (20)	.009**
Q9. The unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference has <u>increased</u> since the Unity Task Force began its work in 2005. ($n = 28$)	2.96 ^a (1.11)		
Q10. If there has been an increase in unity in the West Ohio Conference, it can be attributed to the work of the Unity Task Force. ($n = 23$)	3.00 ^a (1.04)		
Other factors			
Q11. Factors other than the Unity Task Force have caused an increase in the sense of unity of the West Ohio Conference since 2005. ($n = 21$)	3.62 ^a (0.92) ^b		

^{a,b} = Comparison of the general sense of unity score and the other factors question.

** = $p < .01$

Bishop Ough responded similarly to survey participants on questions 9 ($M = 2.96$), 10 ($M = 3.00$), and 11 ($M = 3.62$). He said if he looked at the continuum from 2005 through 2012, he would have had moments when he strongly agreed that the unity in the conference had increased since the Unity Task Force began its work, and he would have had other moments when he would have strongly disagreed. Therefore in 2012, because the negatives countered the positives, the end result was that Bishop Ough neither agreed or disagreed. Bishop Ough did not believe that any increase in sense of unity the conference could be attributed only to the work of the Unity Task Force. He stated that what unity the conference has at this point is really a result of focusing on the mission.

Thus, for question 11, Bishop Ough agreed that factors other than the Unity Task Force contributed to any perceived sense of unity in the conference.

In open-ended question 12, participants indicated that if an increase occurred in the sense of unity, two significant factors (other than the Unity Task Force) had contributed to that increase. The major factor mentioned was Bishop Ough's leadership (eleven times). Bishop Ough concurred. His leadership and focus on casting and living into the vision, strategic alignment around missional engagement, and leadership development played the most significant role in bringing any unity to the conference. The Unity Task Force was one of the strategies Bishop Ough used to try to bring unity to a very divided conference. The second major theme that is closely aligned with the first is missional focus (mentioned six times). Bishop Ough intentionally, strategically, and repeatedly called people to rise above their differences and focus on the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Participants raised a minor theme (mentioned three times) of an increase of maturity of members of the conference. This minor theme may also be linked with the major theme of the bishop's leadership—as the statements made seemed to refer, at least partially, to an increased maturity that resulted from the bishop's effort which included the Unity Task Force (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12. Other Factors That Contributed to Unity

Themes	Times Mentioned (N = 20)
Major themes:	
Bishop Ough's leadership	11
Missional focus	6
Minor theme:	
Maturity of members of the annual conference	3

Specific Forms of Unity after the Unity Task Force

Statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the survey responses based on the type of unity—soteriological, functional, and missional.

Soteriological unity. Means and standard deviations were computed from the other items to assess the sense of soteriological unity subsequent to the work of the Unity Task Force. Overall, participants seemed to believe that people in the West Ohio Conference showed neither an increase nor decrease in the fruit of the Spirit ($M = 2.96$; $SD = 1.06$) nor in humility and/or selfishness ($M = 2.85$; $SD = 1.10$). A paired samples t -test showed that they showed greater agreement that the Unity Task Force had not helped increase devotion to the Lord ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 0.94$; $t [20] = 2.21$; $p = .037$). Bishop Ough indicated that in the early days of the Unity Task Force (prior to the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO), he sensed at least several times when the members of the Unity Task Force became vulnerable and experienced a strong spiritual unity, and that their spiritual connection transcended their immediate *agendas* (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13. Means and Standard Deviations for Soteriological Unity after the Unity Task Force

Survey Question	M (SD) n = 25
Q14. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people in the West Ohio Conference exhibit an <i>increase in the fruit of the Spirit</i> ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" Gal. 5:22-23; n = 27).	2.96 (1.06)
Q15. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people in the West Ohio Conference exhibit <i>more humility and/or selflessness</i> (n = 27).	2.85 (1.10)
Q16. The Unity Task Force has <u>not</u> affected West Ohio Conference members' <i>devotion to Jesus Christ as their Lord</i> (n = 25).	3.65 ^a (0.94)
Soteriological unity (n = 25)	2.70 (0.82)

^a = Reversed score in computing categorical mean

Functional unity. Means and standard deviations were computed from the other items to assess the sense of functional unity subsequent to the work of the Unity Task Force. Participants indicated they saw a slight increase in a sense of community or collegiality between people of differing theological perspectives in the West Ohio Annual Conference (M = 2.75; SD = 0.93) and a slight increase in civility in the atmosphere surrounding general and jurisdictional conference elections (M = 3.38; SD = 1.27). Overall, participants seemed to agree that people in the West Ohio Conference have shown a slight increase in self-control or self-correction to avoid inflammatory language regarding different theological perspectives (M = 3.44; SD = 1.00). Bishop Ough concurred that the proposed election process significantly helped facilitate greater functional unity in the conference. He suggested that the general and jurisdictional conference delegation elected almost immediately after that legislation was one of "the most diverse and fully inclusive delegations" the conference has ever had (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14. Means and Standard Deviations for Functional Unity after the Unity Task Force

Survey Question	M (SD) n = 25
Q17. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have <u>not</u> seen people <i>of differing theological perspectives</i> in the West Ohio Annual Conference exhibit a <i>greater sense of community</i> or <i>more collegiality</i> (n = 25).	2.75 ^a (0.93)
Q18. Since the West Ohio Conference adopted the Unity Task Force's proposed legislative changes (June 2006) for how general and jurisdictional conference delegates and alternates are elected, the atmosphere around the <i>elections has become more civil</i> (n = 29).	3.38 (1.27)
Q19. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people or groups within the West Ohio Conference <i>show more self-control or self-correction</i> to avoid inflammatory language in their conversation with or about persons of different theological perspectives (n = 25).	3.44 (1.00)
Functional unity	3.36 (0.78)

^a = Reversed score in computing categorical mean

Missional unity. Means and standard deviations were computed from questions 20, 21, and 22 to assess the sense of missional unity subsequent to the work of the Unity Task Force. Overall, participants seemed to agree that people in the West Ohio Conference have shown an increase in shared missional activities (M = 3.70; SD = 0.87) and in striving together in making disciples (M = 3.33; SD = 0.96). They had not seen a change in how welcoming the people of the West Ohio Conference are to others who are different from themselves (M = 3.04; SD = 0.87). Bishop Ough agreed with the growing sense of missional unity in the conference, but he noted it was not a result of the Unity Task Force's work (see Table 4.15).

Table 4.15. Means and Standard Deviations for Missional Unity after the Unity Task Force

Survey Question	M (SD) n = 25
Q20. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people of <i>differing theological perspectives</i> in the West Ohio Conference <i>engage in more missions together</i> . (Missions can include but are not limited to mission trips or missional projects or activities sponsored by a local church, district, or the annual conference; n = 27).	3.70 (0.87)
Q21. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen <u>more</u> people of <i>differing theological perspectives</i> in the West Ohio Conference <i>intentionally strive together to live out the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world</i> (n = 27).	3.33 (0.96)
Q22. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, the people of the West Ohio Conference have <u>not</u> become more welcoming or hospitable to others who are different from themselves (n = 26).	3.04 ^a (0.87)
Missional unity	3.35 (0.69)

^a = Reversed score in computing categorical mean

Comparisons. A repeated measures analysis of variance explored the degree of agreement across the three types of unity. Overall, participants (n = 23) seemed to agree that people in the West Ohio Conference have shown more increase in functional (M = 3.26; SE = 0.18) and missional unity (M = 3.33; SE = 0.13) than in soteriological unity (M = 2.73; SE = 0.19; $F(1, 20) = 22.46$; $p < .001$; see Tables 4.13, 4.14, 4.15; Figure 4.3). The lower scoring of soteriological unity likely is due to the fact that the perceived changes in soteriological unity tended to be ascribed to factors other than the Unity Task Force.

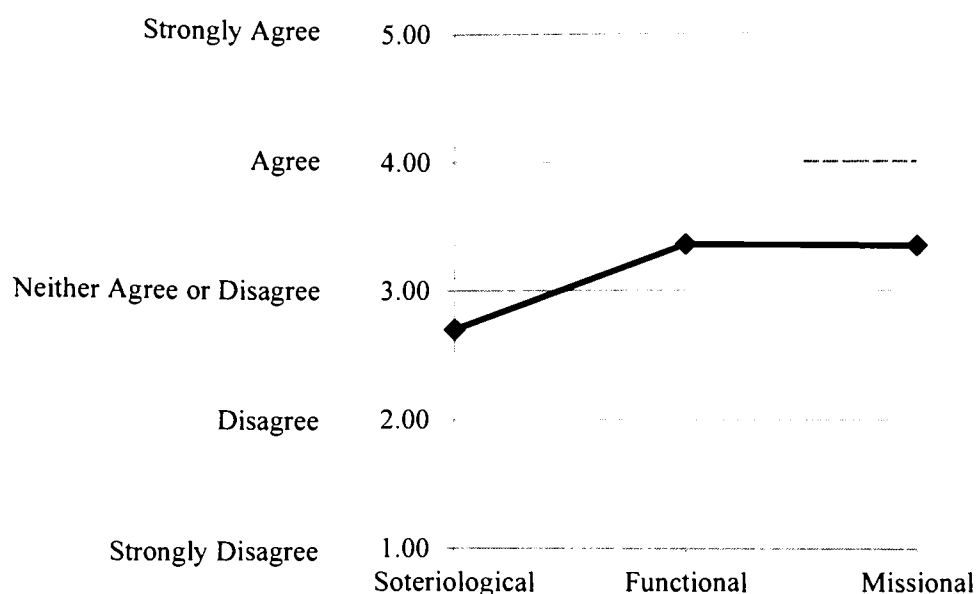


Figure 4.3. Mean increase of soteriological, functional, and missional unity resulting from the work of the unity task force.

Methods of the Unity Task Force

Means and standard deviations were computed from the other items to assess the degree of agreement with the effectiveness of the methods of the Unity Task Force (see Tables 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19). Overall, participants who had knowledge of all of the methods offered by the Unity Task Force ($n = 10$) seemed to believe that these methods were not effective ($M = 2.53$; $SD = 0.44$). While survey participants indicated the Unity Task Force's proposed legislative changes helped the atmosphere around elections to become more civil ($M = 3.38$; $SD = 1.27$), they indicated neither of the proposed legislative changes (about elections [$M = 2.50$; $SD = 1.27$] and "Proposing a Way Forward" [$M = 1.92$; $SD = 1.00$]) positively impacted the sense of unity in the conference.

Table 4.16. Means and Standard Deviations for the Unity Task Force's Method—Legislation

Survey Question	M (SD)
Q23. The Unity Task Force's legislation governing how delegates are elected to general and jurisdictional conference (and then was adopted by the West Ohio Conference in June 2006) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference (n = 26).	2.50 (1.07)
Q37. In 2010, the Unity Task Force proposed legislation ("Proposing a Way Forward") to guide the annual conference in handling the nomination of an openly gay Chief Financial Officer (Conference Treasurer). This legislation that was then adopted by the West Ohio Conference positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference (n = 25).	1.92 (1.00)

The West Ohio Conference Elections Team conducted an informal evaluation following the 2007 election of general and jurisdictional conference delegates—the first time the Unity Task Force's proposed legislation was used. As of 26 June 2007, 285 people completed the evaluation (241 laity and 44 clergy). When asked if the voting process and atmosphere had improved from four years prior, 120 lay members said *Yes*; 14 *No*; 83 *Not Applicable* because they were first-time voters; and 24 *Not Applicable* for other reasons. Of the clergy responding, 39 said *Yes*; 4 *No*; and 1 *Not Applicable* because they were first-time voters. Many commented that the election was the "best ever." At the conclusion of the 2011 annual conference, which included elections for the 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences), at least several people told me it was the least contentious annual conference they had ever experienced and some had been members of the conference for twenty-five or more years.

Participants did not believe the Unity Task Force's conferences or workshops positively impacted the sense of unity in the conference. The low attendance rates of the very conservatives and more conservatives at the workshops sponsored by the Unity Task

Force likely stems from their underlying mistrust of conference workshops on unity. At Unity Task Force meetings and in many conversations in and around the conference, I repeatedly heard conservatives say they do not attend the conferences because they believe they are a waste of time and their unspoken purpose is to convince persons to conform to the liberal perspective (see Table 4.17; Figure 4.4).

Table 4.17. Means and Standard Deviations for the Unity Task Force’s Method—Conferences and Workshops

Survey Question	M (SD)
Q24. The Unity Task Force’s Christology Conference: “Who Do You Say that I Am?” (Sept. 2006) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.36 (0.84)
Q25. The Unity Task Force’s workshop “A Conversation about Our Understandings of Homosexuality” (June 2007) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.05 (0.78)
Q26. The Unity Task Force’s workshop “Will You Hear Me Now? A Day of Christian Conversation about Homosexuality and the Church” (Oct. 2007) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	1.94 (0.64)
Q27. The Unity Task Force’s dialogue session “A Unity Gathering and Dialogue for ministry focus groups and caucuses” (Nov. 2008 and May 2009) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.41 (0.87)
Q28. The Unity Task Force’s workshop “Covenant in the Midst of Conflict” (Oct. 2010) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.63 (1.03)

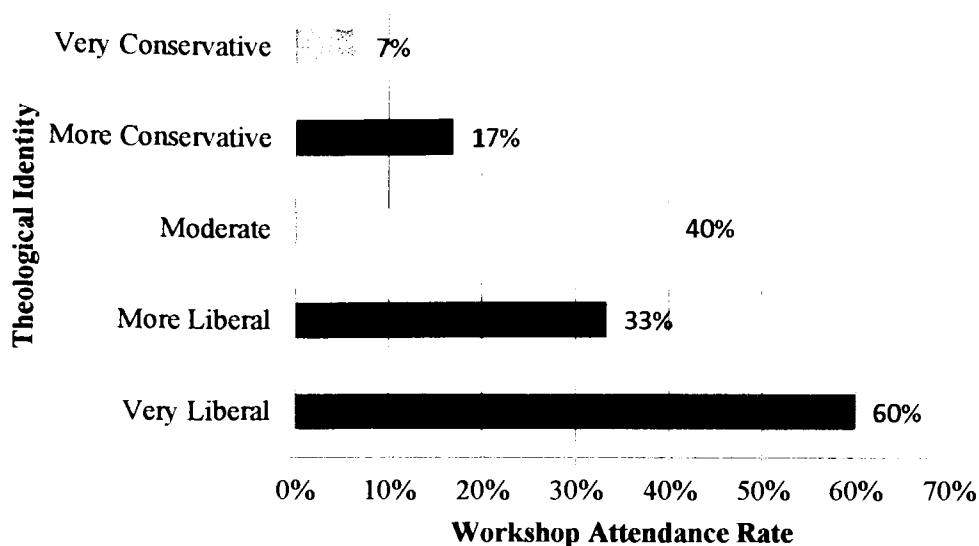


Figure 4.4. Attendance rates at workshops sponsored by unity task force.

Participants did believe the Unity Task Force's dialogue or communication tools slightly positively impacted the sense of unity in the conference: "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" ($M = 3.29$; $SD = 0.91$), and "Respectful Communication Guidelines" promoted unity ($M = 3.70$; $SD = 0.77$; see Table 4.18). Although the participants affirmed to a small degree that the Unity Task Force modeled unity, respect, and civil discourse, they felt it had only a slightly positively impacted the sense of unity in the conference ($M = 3.08$; $SD = 0.94$; see Table 4.19).

**Table 4.18. Means and Standard Deviations for the Unity Task Force's Method—
Dialogue or Communication Tools**

Survey Question	<i>M (SD)</i>
Q30. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" (beginning in 2006) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.29 (0.91)
Q31. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Holy Conferencing" (beginning in 2007) did <u>not</u> positively impact the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.00 ^a (1.00)
Q32. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Respectful Communication Guidelines" (beginning in 2008) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.70 (0.77)

^a = Reversed score in computing categorical mean

Means and standard deviations were computed from the other items to assess the perception of the modeling of the Unity Task Force. Overall, participants ($n = 22$) seemed to believe that the modeling of the Unity Task Force was positive ($M = 3.19$; $SD = 0.74$). In fact, using a paired samples t -test, this modeling ($M = 3.13$; $SD = 0.67$) was seen as more effective than the programs ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 0.47$) of the Unity Task Force, ($t [7] = -4.39$; $p = .003$), by a small group of participants responding to all the items ($n = 8$). Regarding modeling, participants indicated the Unity Task Force had modeled unity ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.08$) and civil discourse ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.80$) and this modeling had a slight positive effect on the sense of unity in the conference ($M = 3.08$; $SD = 0.94$; see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19. Means and Standard Deviations for the Unity Task Force's Method—Modeling

Survey Question	M (SD)
Q33. The Unity Task Force has modeled unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.48 (1.08)
Q34. The Unity Task Force has <u>not</u> modeled respect for persons with different theological understandings in the West Ohio Conference.	2.50 ^a (0.99)
Q35. The Unity Task Force has modeled civil discourse in the West Ohio Conference.	3.62 (0.80)
Q36. This modeling of the Unity Task Force (in unity, respect, or civil discourse) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.08 (0.94)
Q38. The Unity Task Force's work to build and model relationships and community between persons with different theological understandings (among members on the task force and in encouraging members of the annual conference to do the same) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.83 (1.05)

^a = Reversed score in computing categorical mean

Other Factors

The data did not reveal any statistically significant differences based on gender, age, ethnicity, theological identity, or public or private sexual identity. Data revealed three significant differences between clergy and laity.

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests comparing the attitudes regarding unity and disunity between clergy and laity revealed only one significant difference. The clergy ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.79$) believed the disunity in the conference now is much higher than what the laity indicated ($M = 3.42$; $SD = 0.67$; $U [28] = 52.50$; $p = .017$; see Table 4.20).

Table 4.20. Means and Standard Deviations for Sense of Unity and Disunity between Clergy and Laity

	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Q1. How strong is the sense of <i>unity</i> in the West Ohio Annual Conference <i>now</i> ?	2.41 (0.51)	2.67 (0.49)	128.00 (28)	.184
Q2. How strong is the sense of <i>disunity</i> in the West Ohio Annual Conference <i>now</i> ?	4.12 (0.70)	3.42 (0.67)	52.50 (28)	.017*
Q3. How strong was the sense of <i>unity</i> in the West Ohio Annual Conference <i>prior</i> to the formation of the Unity Task Force in 2005?	2.31 (0.48)	1.89 (0.60)	46.50 (24)	.078
Q4. How strong was the sense of <i>disunity</i> in the West Ohio Annual Conference <i>prior</i> to the formation of the Unity Task Force in 2005?	4.00 (0.73)	4.22 (1.09)	88.00 (24)	.335

* = Statistically significant

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests comparing the types of unity between clergy and laity revealed no significant differences between soteriological unity and functional unity, or any of their related items, and only one significant difference regarding missional unity, with clergy (M = 3.06; SD = 0.55) and laity (M = 3.92; SD = 0.61; U [23] = 108.50; $p = .006$). The tests revealed one significant item under Missional Unity; clergy expressed greater agreement (M = 3.24; SD = 0.75) than the laity (M = 2.67; SD = 1.00; U [27] = 54.50; $p < .001$) to the statement, “Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, the people of the West Ohio Conference have NOT become more welcoming or hospitable to others who are different from themselves” (see Tables 4.21, 4.22, 4.23).

Table 4.21. Means and Standard Deviations for Types of Soteriological Unity between Clergy and Laity

Survey Question	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Soteriological unity	2.56 (0.82)	3.13 (0.69)	98.00 (24)	.077
Q14. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people in the West Ohio Conference exhibit an increase in the fruit of the Spirit ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" [Gal. 5:22-23]).	2.65 (1.06)	3.50 (0.85)	122.50 (26)	.050
Q15. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people in the West Ohio Conference exhibit more humility and/or selflessness.	2.53 (1.01)	3.40 (1.08)	121.50 (26)	.052
Q16. The Unity Task Force has NOT affected West Ohio Conference members' devotion to Jesus Christ as their Lord.	3.65 (0.86)	3.56 (1.13)	73.50 (25)	.863

Table 4.22. Means and Standard Deviations for Types of Functional Unity between Clergy and Laity

Survey Question	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Functional unity	3.22 (0.77)	3.67 (0.75)	97.50 (24)	.129
Q18. Since the West Ohio Conference adopted the Unity Task Force's proposed legislative changes (June 2006) for how general and jurisdictional conference delegates and alternates are elected, the atmosphere around the elections has become more civil.	3.24 (1.35)	3.67 (1.12)	90.00 (25)	.449
Q19. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people or groups within the West Ohio Conference show more self-control or self-correction to avoid inflammatory language in their conversation with or about persons of different theological perspectives.	3.31 (1.08)	3.67 (0.87)	83.00 (24)	.487

Table 4.23. Means and Standard Deviations for Types of Missional Unity between Clergy and Laity

Survey Question	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Missional unity	3.06 (0.55)	3.92 (0.61)	108.50 (23)	.006*
Q20. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people of differing theological perspectives in the West Ohio Conference engage in more missions together. (Missions can include but is not limited to mission trips or missional projects or activities sponsored by a local church, district, or the annual conference.)	3.44 (0.89)	4.09 (0.70)	122.50 (26)	.064
Q21. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen MORE people of differing theological perspectives in the West Ohio Conference intentionally strive TOGETHER to live out the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.	3.06 (0.97)	3.80 (0.79)	51.00 (25)	.145
Q22. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, the people of the West Ohio Conference have NOT become more welcoming or hospitable to others who are different from themselves.	3.24 (0.75)	2.67 (1.00)	54.50 (28)	.000**

* and ** = Statistically significant

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests comparing the attitudes of the clergy and laity toward the different methods employed by the Unity Task Force revealed no significant differences for most of the methods. However, clergy ($M = 2.12$; $SD = 0.86$) and laity ($M = 3.22$; $SD = 1.09$) differed on one item, “The Unity Task Force’s legislation governing how delegates are elected to general and jurisdictional conference (and then was adopted by the West Ohio Conference in June 2006) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference” ($U [24] = 119.50$; $p = .01$; see Tables 4.24, 4.25, 4.26, 4.27).

Table 4.24. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes of Clergy and Laity about Methods Used by the Unity Task Force—Overall

Survey Question	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Composite of all methods of the Unity Task Force	2.25 (0.47)	2.55 (----)	3.00 (9)	.595

Table 4.25. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes of Clergy and Laity about Methods Used by the Unity Task Force—Legislation

Survey Question	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Q23. The Unity Task Force's legislation governing how delegates are elected to general and jurisdictional conference (and then was adopted by the West Ohio Conference in June 2006) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.12 (0.86)	3.22 (1.09)	119.50 (25)	.011*
Q37. In 2010, the Unity Task Force proposed legislation ("Proposing a Way Forward") to guide the annual conference in handling the nomination of an openly gay Chief Financial Officer (Conference Treasurer). This legislation that was then adopted by the West Ohio Conference positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	1.93 (0.88)	1.90 (1.20)	67.00 (24)	.634

* = Statistically significant

Table 4.26. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes of Clergy and Laity about Methods Used by the Unity Task Force—Conferences and Workshops

Survey Question	Clergy <i>M</i> (SD)	Laity <i>M</i> (SD)	<i>U</i> (df)	<i>p</i>
Q24. The Unity Task Force's Christology Conference: "Who Do You Say that I Am?" (Sept. 2006) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.31 (0.86)	3.00 (----)	10.50 (13)	.250
Q25. The Unity Task Force's workshop "A Conversation about Our Understandings of Homosexuality" (June 2007) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.08 (0.76)	2.00 (0.89)	37.00 (18)	.852
Q26. The Unity Task Force's workshop "Will You Hear Me Now? A Day of Christian Conversation about Homosexuality and the Church" (Oct. 2007) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.00 (0.58)	1.80 (0.84)	27.00 (17)	.534
Q27. The Unity Task Force's dialogue session "A Unity Gathering and Dialogue for ministry focus groups and caucuses" (Nov. 2008 and May 2009) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.42 (0.79)	2.40 (1.14)	28.50 (17)	.865
Q28. The Unity Task Force's workshop "Covenant in the Midst of Conflict" (Oct. 2010) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.73 (1.01)	2.40 (1.14)	22.00 (15)	.511

Table 4.27. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes of Clergy and Laity about Methods Used by the Unity Task Force—Dialogue or Communication Tools

Survey Question	Clergy <i>M</i> (SD)	Laity <i>M</i> (SD)	<i>U</i> (df)	<i>p</i>
Q30. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" (beginning in 2006) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.20 (0.94)	3.44 (0.88)	74.50 (23)	.655
Q31. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Holy Conferencing" (beginning in 2007) did <i>not</i> positively impact the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.14 (0.86)	2.78 (1.20)	52.00 (22)	.458
Q32. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Respectful Communication Guidelines" (beginning in 2008) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.50 (0.65)	4.00 (0.87)	82.50 (22)	.182

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests compared the attitudes of clergy and laity about the modeling of the Unity Task Force. The tests revealed no significant differences for any item regarding the modeling (see Table 4.28).

Table 4.28. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes of Clergy and Laity about Modeling of the Unity Task Force

Survey Question	Clergy M (SD)	Laity M (SD)	U (df)	<i>p</i>
Modeling of the Unity Task Force	3.20 (0.65)	3.17 (0.96)	54.50 (21)	.887
Q33. The Unity Task Force has modeled unity in the West Ohio Conference.	3.40 (0.83)	3.60 (1.43)	93.00 (24)	.258
Q34. The Unity Task Force has NOT modeled respect for persons with different theological understandings in the West Ohio Conference.	2.56 (0.81)	2.40 (1.27)	67.00 (25)	.444
Q35. The Unity Task Force has modeled civil discourse in the West Ohio Conference.	3.59 (0.87)	3.67 (0.71)	124.00 (25)	.869
Q36. This modeling of the Unity Task Force (in unity, respect, or civil discourse) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.88 (0.86)	3.44 (1.01)	146.00 (26)	.164
Q38. The Unity Task Force's work to build and model relationships and community between persons with different theological understandings (among members on the task force and in encouraging members of the annual conference to do the same) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.	2.69 (0.95)	3.13 (1.27)	122.00 (25)	.634

Research Question #4

The fourth research question was, “How did significant events impact the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church?” Significant events both positively and negatively impacted the perceived unity of the West Ohio Conference. The Unity Task Force, Extended Cabinet, and delegates and alternates named four significant events that positively affected the perceived unity in the West Ohio: (1) being in ministry and mission together, (2) worship at annual conference, (3) the episcopal address each year at annual conference, and (4) the additional structure for the election of delegates (originally proposed by the Unity Task Force). The only one named by all three groups

was being in ministry and mission together. Two groups mentioned worship at annual conference, and only one group mentioned the remaining two (see Table 4.29).

Table 4.29. Significant Events that Positively Affected Perceived Unity in West Ohio Conference

Significant Event	Named by Unity Task Force	Named by Extended Cabinet	Named by Delegates
Being in ministry and mission together	X	X	X
Worship at annual conference		X	X
Episcopal address at annual conference		X	
Additional structure for election of delegates			X

The Unity Task Force, Extended Cabinet, and delegates and alternates named four significant events that negatively affected the perceived unity in the West Ohio Conference: (1) the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO, (2) General Conference and the continued division surrounding the denomination's stance on homosexuality, (3) the election of delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences, and (4) the 2008 delegation's refusal to endorse the conference's only episcopal candidate that quadrennium . The only one of those mentioned by all three was the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO. Two groups mentioned general conference, and only one group mentioned the election of delegates and the 2008 delegation's refusal to endorse the conference's only episcopal candidate (see Table 4.30).

Table 4.30. Significant Events that Negatively Affected Perceived Unity in West Ohio Conference

Significant Event	Named by Unity Task Force	Named by Extended Cabinet	Named by Delegates
Nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO	X	X	X
General Conference (continued division on UMC's stance on homosexuality)	X	X	
Election of delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences		X	
2008 delegation's refusal to endorse conference's only episcopal candidate			X

The Unity Task Force and delegates both mentioned that the nomination and election of a homosexual CFO served as a watershed moment in the conference—one that undid the previous ten years of work to build unity. The delegates, who mentioned the event eleven times, said the event and the “backroom” way the conference leadership handled it, led once again to increased polarization and significantly lowered trust in the bishop and leadership of the conference in general. Bishop Ough mentioned several times in his interview that the election and events leading up to it clearly and negatively influenced the perceived unity in the conference. He suggested the outcome of this research would have been much different and showed a much more positive effect on unity had the study been conducted prior to the election in 2010 (see Table 4.31).

Table 4.31. Significant Events, As Identified by Delegates, That Affected Perceived Unity in West Ohio Conference

Themes	Times Mentioned (N = 23)
Negative:	
Nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO	11
Mistrust	4
2008 delegation's refusal to endorse conference's only episcopal candidate	1
Positive:	
Being in ministry and mission together	5
Additional structure for election of delegates	2
Worship at annual conference	2

I have not previously noted comments made by only one person for each survey question's response. However, I believed worthy of mention the one comment about the 2008 delegation's refusal to endorse the only episcopal candidate in the conference that year (see Table 4.2, p. 82). While only one person mentioned the event here, three persons mentioned it, but two of those times occurred in responses to two other questions (questions 5 and 8, as a sign of disunity). Bishop Ough also shared the concern that the decision not to endorse the conference's only episcopal candidate "would undermine the communal spirit of the delegation" and "create a sense in the Annual Conference that the Task Force and Conference effort at unity is futile" (Unity Task Force, Meeting Minutes 3 Mar. 2008). The lack of endorsement resulted from the polarized theological diversity within the delegation, as well as from the lack of trust for one another that accompanied the theological diversity.

Summary of Major Findings

This study on the effect of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church produced three major findings:

1. The Unity Task Force caused little, if any, increase in the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.
2. Building relationships with God and each other is the key to maintaining and building unity.
3. Significant events both positively and negatively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

The following chapter includes personal observations, literature review, biblical implications, and practical implications for these findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Theological division among believers has for centuries hindered the unity and harmed the mission of the Church. Despite God's call for believers to live in unity with God and other believers, the Church has continued to be plagued with divisions that prevent the world from seeing and being drawn to Christ and Christ's love in them. Christ said everyone would know they were his disciples if they loved one another (John 13:35), but instead, the Church is more often known for its rancor and divisions. Therefore, the Church must find ways to maintain and attain the unity to which God calls it. While many know this call to unity, few have done research to learn what does or does not help believers find unity.

Bishop Ough formed the Unity Task Force to try to bring greater unity to the theologically polarized West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The purpose of this study was to discover if the Unity Task Force had any impact on the sense of unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Using an exploratory, mixed-methods research design, I interviewed or surveyed members of the Unity Task Force, the Extended Cabinet, the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates of the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and the resident bishop.

Little increase in the sense of unity

The Unity Task Force caused little, if any, increase in the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. All four participant groups confirmed this finding.

Personal observation. As a clergy member of the West Ohio Conference for fifteen years, the Unity Task Force for all its seven years, and the 2008 and 2012 delegations to general and jurisdictional conferences, I agree with the survey participant who said the West Ohio Conference has a *veneer* of unity. While the work of the Unity Task Force caused little, if any, measurable increase in the overall sense of unity in the conference, the research revealed the legislation governing general and jurisdictional conference elections helped the atmosphere become more civil, and the communication and dialogue tools presented by the Unity Task Force helped members tone down the rancor and name calling that previously occurred. The increased civility and reduced rancor gave the conference a veneer or superficial appearance of unity. Prior to the Unity Task Force, survey participants identified hate-filled communication as the major sign of disunity. Seven years later after the Unity Task Force worked to bring unity to the conference, participants did not even mention hate-filled communication as a sign of disunity; rather, they named the lack of open, honest communication as a major sign of disunity. Thus, the methods and practices introduced by the Unity Task Force significantly helped to reduce the level of rancor but apparently at the cost of open, honest communication.

Survey participants indicated the Unity Task Force modeled unity and civility, at least to a small degree, but they did not believe the modeling or symbolic unity caused an

increase in the sense of unity in the conference. While participants in the Unity Task Force's educational workshops and dialogue sessions generally evaluated them positively, survey participants indicated they were ineffective in increasing the sense of unity in the conference.

Not surprisingly, members of the conference did not identify an increase in soteriological unity because of the Unity Task Force's work. Soteriological unity results when a person becomes one with Christ. As a person grows closer to Christ, the person should become more Christlike. The work of the Unity Task Force assumed at least a basic level of soteriological unity and focused more on trying to build functional and missional unity. The slight increase in functional unity likely resulted from the bishop's overall call and work to build unity—of which the Unity Task Force was a part. The slight increase in missional unity likely primarily resulted from the bishop's overall vision and work to call the conference to live out Christ's mission, which then helped to lift them above their theological differences.

While statistically the Unity Task Force caused little or no increase in the sense of unity of the West Ohio Conference, people outside the conference noticed a difference. Following the 2008 general conference, three persons from other annual conferences noticed the community within the delegation (despite their obvious theological differences and in contrast to previous general conferences) and asked Bishop Ough what they were doing in West Ohio. Members of the 2008 West Ohio delegation also noted "the sense of community, mutual respect and conviviality of the West Ohio Delegation, in marked contrast to their experience the [previous] three general conferences sessions"

and noted that delegates from either side of the theological spectrum helped each other to be recognized to speak (Unity Task Force, Meeting Minutes 22 May 2008).

While the West Ohio Annual Conference, Unity Task Force, and general and jurisdictional conference delegations have shown glimpses of unity, the politics and drama involved with the debates and disagreements still occasionally result in messy and uncomfortable situations. The politics of the West Ohio Conference mirror the politics in Ohio, as witnessed in the recent presidential election. One would hope, however, that their theological understanding and relationship with Christ would help them rise above the muck and mire of the politics and speak the truth in love as they seek to maintain and build the unity of Christ that only Christ may provide.

Although the Unity Task Force may not have significantly increased the overall sense of unity in the conference, a member from the Extended Cabinet stated, “I would hate to see where we would be without [the Unity Task Force].” If the conference had not had the Unity Task Force’s proposed election legislation and communication tools to help guide the conversations resulting from events that significantly and negatively impacted the sense of unity in the conference, the sense of unity in the conference may have declined even further. While the Unity Task Force cannot take full credit for the unity work that has taken place, the work of the task force helped the process as part of a systemic whole.

Literature review. Some peaceful societies try to address conflict by avoiding it (Bonta 416). However, avoiding conversations about controversial issues (as conference members thought happened in their efforts to seek unity) did not help the West Ohio Conference resolve their conflict or disunity.

Leaders cannot change the behavior of those they lead, but they can create meaningful symbols and activities through various forms of communication to help the people understand and choose to practice the proposed behavior (Pondy 94-95). The Unity Task Force provided symbolic leadership to the West Ohio Conference by verbally communicating and modeling agreeing and disagreeing in love, holy conferencing, building relationships with and sharing intentional and strategic leadership with people on opposite sides of the great theological divide, offering a prayer for the entire conference to pray for the 2008 delegates to general conference, and hosting several gatherings of leaders to include others in the discussion. While some saw this leadership as compromising beliefs, others saw it as it was intended—a way to work towards and model unity, even and especially in the midst of diametrically opposed views.

When I e-mailed Bishop Will Willimon to ask if the North Alabama Annual Conference had a unity task force, he shared an insightful response:

I confess that I am not sure that where there is disunity, a unity group is the answer. I think that when there are divisions, the divisions are often deep and not responsive to calls for unity. People are often divided because they hold deep, abiding differences about the church and its ministry. In a way, maybe we shouldn't want unity as much as communion despite our differences. Also, sometimes, if we love unity too much, we merely suppress our differences and ignore our conflicts in order to have unity. I think the United States shows that it is possible to have people unified, but it requires an army, lots of laws, lots of restraints, and lots of keeping some groups quiet.... Our unity, our only unity is in Christ. He has an ability to hold lots of different sorts of people together.

Bishop Willimon's comments seem consistent with the findings in this research. Despite the best efforts of the Unity Task Force, they could do little to bridge the deep divisions in the West Ohio Conference. Focusing on unity may have unintentionally caused suppression of honest dialogue of differences. The places where the conference saw

glimpses of unity came as members sought community with others despite their differences. As Willimon said, their only unity is in Christ, and only he can hold together such a diverse people.

Biblical. In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul begs believers to lead a life worthy of their calling—a life of humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love, “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Believers find their unity or oneness, not in doctrine or behaviors or beliefs, but in one body, one Spirit, one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (4:4-6). This reminder of one God alludes to the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4 where Moses proclaims only one God exists (Barth 464). Paul mentions “one” seven times in Ephesians 4:4-6, likely symbolizing perfection or wholeness as in Revelation (Barth 463). The only and perfect place to find oneness is in the one God who is three-in-one, a communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (466). In the same way God is one, God calls diverse believers to be one with him and one with each other: “The church cannot be one except when it attests to its God-given oneness by proving unity in diversity, and when it ventures to respect diversity in unity” (466). The unity and peace of believers is dependent on the faith of God’s Son in God, not on their own faith in Jesus. Jesus’ faith in God is the substance of believers’ hope and “their ability to withstand attacks from outside, to face errors from inside, and to fulfill their mission” (489). The perfect Christ is the only one who can make the church perfect (489).

Informs practice of ministry. Unity of the church is not the goal or the end itself but evidence and a necessary sign of God’s work in and beyond the church (Barth 462).

Believers cannot manufacture this oneness; it is a gift from God when they are one with God. They are, however, called to do everything they can to maintain this unity (Eph. 4:3) and to build it up until all reach maturity in Christ (4:13). Communication skills and tools, educational workshops and dialogue sessions, legislation, modeling, and any other practices cannot build unity among believers unless they draw people closer to the one true God who makes them one. While such practices by themselves do not build unity, they may open God's Word in a way that points people to God, and they may teach and model for people how to communicate with civility so they can see and hear the God within them. If such practices can help people draw closer to God, then God can work through the practices to help draw them closer to him and each other.

Relationships key to maintaining and building unity

Building relationships with God and each other is the key to building and maintaining unity. God's call to unity is a call to be in relationship.

Personal observation. The first time I attended jurisdictional conference (in 2004), I was appalled, ashamed, embarrassed, and saddened by delegates' words and behaviors toward one another. Instead of loving and bearing with one another, speaking the truth in love, and appreciating each other's differences, they backstabbed, lied, made deals, and saw each other only as theological labels, not as real persons created in the image of God and with whom God called them to be in relationship and ministry with each other.

When Bishop Ough asked me to be part of the Unity Task Force in 2005, I readily accepted his invitation. The Unity Task Force's initial meetings focused on building relationships with people we might have only previously known by their theological

labels of liberal or conservative. We began to get to know each other as real people who had a love for Jesus, a love for God's people, and real-life concerns—all of which were not very different from our own. As we got to know each other personally, studied God's Word together, prayed together, and tried to work towards a more loving, Christlike, and unified annual conference, God began to make us one in Christ. Our relationships with God and with each other are what made us one. Unfortunately, the unity experienced in the early years of the Unity Task Force deteriorated when new members joined the group because the group did not spend as much time building relationships with each other as they had when the group first formed.

When additional members joined the Unity Task Force in December 2009, the group spent very little time building relationships (their first meeting included only a brief time for community building) compared to the extensive time spent building relationships from 2005 through 2007. Community building appeared on the task force's agenda at least five times in that period, and sometimes the community building took most or all of the meeting time. In looking back, Bishop Ough acknowledged that when he tried to expand the group to replace some members who had drifted away and to add other voices, the members had little time to build relationships and experience "moments of vulnerability and spiritual connection that the early task force had" before the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO. From what I have heard and observed in the Extended Cabinet, they, too, have experienced unity in Christ. Through their many days of working together each year for a number of years, through their caring and praying for one another in their times of need, and through their work together to help the conference and churches live out their mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ,

they have grown closer in their relationships with God and with each other. The God who is the center of their relationships brought them unity with each other, even in the midst of their rich diversity.

Bishop Ough said his hope had always been that the relationships formed and the unity experienced in the early years of the Unity Task Force would be replicated in other settings. He knew, however, that replicating such a group would be very difficult because it would require people spending a lot of time together, building a lot of trust, and having a fundamental covenant that they would stay at the table. Building this type of relationship would be extremely unlikely in a large auditorium of the approximately 2,150 people who gather for annual conference a few days each year, especially with some of those people changing from year to year.

Many of the efforts of the Unity Task Force included ways for persons within the conference to begin to develop relationships with each other. The task force hoped the communication and dialogue tools would help people learn to communicate better with each other so they could begin to build relationships. They hoped the educational workshops and dialogue sessions would provide opportunities to help people gain a better understanding of God's Word and to dialogue with and begin to get to know one another. They hoped the modeling of unity would be an example that others in the conference would see and replicate. While the practices or methods themselves did not build unity, some of the efforts at least began to help provide opportunities where people could start to build relationships and possibly experience unity.

After the June 2007 leaders gathering hosted by the Unity Task Force, twenty out of twenty-one very positively indicated they thought the task force should continue to sponsor such dialogues. Some participants commented on their evaluations:

It helps me to have a personal relationship and opportunity to dialogue with people who I don't always agree with.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share openly and honestly with persons at the table. I felt each person's comments were welcomed and received without judgment. This experience helped me better appreciate the heart of those who may disagree—yet graciously love.

It is more difficult to be vehemently opposed to 'the other side' when time is spent forming relationships.

It's wonderful that we can get to know each other as people and not just "labels."

A Unity Task Force member once commented, "The value of dialogue is keeping us at the table, keeping us in relationship" (Unity Task Force, Meeting Minutes 12 May 2005), and another stated, "Relationship trumps theology. We have to be in right relationship to be in right theology" (2 Dec. 2009).

Literature review. LaCugna understands that the Trinity includes the relationships among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as with humans:

The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about 'God' but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other* [original emphasis]. It is a life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other. (228)

Christian unity is a trinity of relationships—believers with God, believers with each other, and believers reaching out to others so they, too, can participate in this trinity of relationships.

When placed in incubators (strategic small groups) within the Northwest Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, pastors experienced an increase in community and unity as they worshipped together, shared their faith stories, gained leadership skills, and developed ministry action plans for their local churches. Pastors who previously experienced serious theological division met together regularly, prayed for one another, realized their common commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ, and became friends (Whitfield).

When Paul wrote his first letter to the divided church in Corinth, he called them to quit living for themselves and, instead, to live in community by living in love (Ackerman 349). He called them to live in union with Christ, which is experiential and rooted in community, and to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), which means to love others with a sacrificial and other-centered love (Phil. 2:16; Ackerman 362). “Love is the one thing that can create unity within the God-ordained diversity in the church” (357). One cannot love in isolation but only in community.

Biblical. God created people in his image, meaning at least in part, God created people to be in relationship with him the way the members of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are in relationship with each other. From the beginning, God did not intend for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). God created people to need each other, love each other, help each other, encourage each other, and build up each other. When people become one with Christ, they become one with each other in the body of Christ. Jesus summed up all the law and the prophets in two commands: (1) to love God with one’s whole being, and (2) to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:36-40). In John 17:20-23, Jesus prayed that all believers would be one with him as he is one with the Father and

one with each other so the world may know God loves them, so they, too, may be one with God and other believers. Jesus called all people to participate in this trinity of relationships, not just to follow the laws and rules. Jesus condemned the Pharisees when they followed the law legalistically while at the same time neglecting relationships (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).

The key to life, ministry, and unity is relationships—with God, with other believers, and with believers reaching out to the world. As stated previously, Jesus Christ is the only who can truly bring unity to a very diverse people.

Informs practice of ministry. If relationships are the key to life, ministry, and unity, then pastors, leaders, congregations, conferences, and denominations should design all worship, studies, service, outreach, missions, ministries, programs, and activities to help people grow in their relationship with God, with other believers, and in reaching out to the world. Studying the Bible is not enough; people must learn to live it in their relationships with God and others. Feeding or helping the poor or needy is not enough, people must serve in such a way that those serving and those being served can grow in their relationships with God and others. Likewise, providing opportunities for dialogue, communication, and civility guidelines, workshops, legislation, or any other method will not build unity among a people unless the methods help people grow in their relationship with Christ who makes them one and in their relationship with one another. Building relationships requires hard work, time, and commitment; therefore, any attempts to build unity must take hard work, time, and commitment. Believers must continuously work on building relationships because significant events can break relationships and hinder unity.

Unity positively and negatively affected by significant events

Significant events both positively and negatively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

Personal observation. The Unity Task Force, Extended Cabinet, and the 2008 and 2012 delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences all named one event that positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference—being in ministry and mission together—and one that negatively impacted the sense of unity—the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO. I did not specifically ask Bishop Ough about significant events, but his answers to other questions indicate he would have agreed with both of these. The three groups mentioned several other events, but none that all three groups named. The election and nomination of a homosexual conference CFO was, by far, the event named most to have impacted the unity of the conference.

All four participant groups in this study identified the nomination and election of a homosexual conference CFO as one that very negatively impacted the sense of unity in the conference. Evidence of the negative impact included congregations and individuals leaving the conference and denomination, congregations withholding apportionments, and a growing mistrust of conference leadership and between the liberals and conservatives. Unity Task Force members and delegates identified it as a watershed moment that undid much of the previous good work done by the Unity Task Force.

Bishop Ough concurred with the Unity Task Force's assessment:

If we could objectively assess the effectiveness of the Unity Task Force pre-[election of the homosexual CFO], I think your research would show something much more positive and that some of the unity we sense around

mission would be more attributable to recommendations the Unity Task Force made early on.

Bishop Ough also concluded that this election, and the events leading up to and after it, shifted both the perception and the effectiveness of the Unity Task Force and either overshadowed or wiped out many of the early gains made by the Unity Task Force. He suggested the outcome of this research would have been much different and showed a much more positive effect on unity had the study been conducted prior to the election in 2010. Bishop Ough equated this event to dropping a bomb in the middle of the Unity Task Force's work, and he suggested that the true test of the conference's unity was if it could withstand a bomb being dropped on it, and it did not.

Biblical. Throughout the Bible, and probably all of Christianity, many significant events have negatively affected unity among God's people. When the twelve spies returned from the Promised Land to report their findings, ten reported that giants inhabited the land and they should not fight them, and the remaining two, Caleb and Joshua, said they should go into and take the Promised Land because God would deliver them (Num. 13:25-33). The people of Israel then raised a loud cry, wept, complained against their leadership, said they should go back to Egypt, and threatened to stone Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:1-10). Because the Israelites refused to obey God, the once united body faced deep division that resulted in their spending another forty years wandering in the wilderness.

Though the early Christian believers experienced tremendous unity after Pentecost, "the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1). The event began to raise

significant division between the Hellenists and Hebrews, but then the disciples stepped in and proposed a peaceful way to resolve the problem (Acts 6:2-7).

In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas had “no small dissension and debate” with others who thought new believers had to be circumcised (15:2). The Jerusalem Council convened and presented a compromise that ultimately pleased neither group. Sometime later, Paul and Barnabas argued about whether John Mark should accompany them on their next trip (Acts 15:36-40). The disagreement brought such division to their previous unity that Paul and Barnabas parted company (15:39). These are just a few examples of events that resulted in significant disagreement and disunity among God’s people. How the people handled the events and resulting division affected how the events impacted their unity.

Informs practice of ministry. Although people or groups may work diligently to build unity, significant events can function, as Bishop Ough described, like a bomb going off in their midst and very negatively impact their sense of unity. Relationships hold a community together. Therefore, communities must continually work to strengthen their relationships with Christ and each other so they have a better chance of maintaining community and unity even when problems come their way. If a significant event shatters relationships and the trust on which the relationships were built, leaders need to find ways to keep people *at the table* and to rebuild trust and relationships.

Implications of the Findings

The Unity Task Force had little, if any, net positive statistical impact on the unity of the West Ohio Conference from pre-2005 to 2012. However, the data suggests that the work of the Unity Task Force, in conjunction with other efforts within the conference to

build unity, did make some positive gains, but most, if not all, of those gains were wiped out by a significant event that very negatively impacted the sense of unity. The data revealed slight increases in functional and missional unity, most of which could not probably be attributed to the work of the Unity Task Force. However, the data also showed that the election legislation and communication techniques and practices introduced by the Unity Task Force did make a positive impact on how people spoke to and treated one another. Although this impact might not quantify as unity, it was at least a step in the right direction toward civility, which then provided opportunities for some to begin building relationships with each other. Building or maintaining unity is an ongoing process, and the work of the Unity Task Force was one of the first steps in the process of building unity in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Relationships are the foundation of Christian unity. Jesus called believers to be, first and foremost, one with him (soteriological unity), and then one with each other (functional unity), and one with each other in ministry to the world (missional unity). If any attempts to build unity skip the essential relationship of soteriological unity, true Christian unity will not result. People may have an outward appearance of unity because they have learned to tolerate each other, play nicely, and not talk badly about each other, but the mere outward appearance does not prove true unity. Therefore, any attempts to build true Christian unity must include ways and means that help people develop and deepen their relationship with Christ and then their relationships with each other.

I have not found any formal research that attempted to measure Christian unity or the extent to which a group or person of any kind may have impacted the sense of unity. Therefore, this research is a first step toward filling a very significant literature gap.

Initially for my research, I considered trying to replicate the Unity Task Force or form groups like it in each of the districts in the West Ohio Conference. However, I discovered I did not have the time or ability to conduct research that would require groups working together for such an extended time. Future research, however, might involve such an endeavor. Such research could include a pretest of the sense of unity before the group formed; a covenant to participate in the group for the stated period of time; work that focused on building relationships—with Christ, with each other, and then in reaching out together to the world; and, then a posttest at the end of the research period to try to quantify the change in sense of unity.

Limitations of the Study

Unity is difficult to quantify and measure, especially because people understand unity differently. Despite my attempts to define and explain biblical unity—and describing it as three types—soteriological, functional, and missional, some still gave answers based on their perception of unity as uniformity, meaning all must agree with that person's perspective. Other persons believe unity means equal representation or full inclusion of everyone into God's kingdom, regardless of their beliefs or practices. These different understandings of unity contributed to the difficulty in measuring unity, as well as measuring the effect of a group or a group's practices on the sense of unity in a body. In this study, I researched the perceived unity and relied on the memories of people from over seven years prior, from the time before the Unity Task Force began its work. Relying on the accuracy of people's memories from that long ago was a limiting factor.

The scope of this study was limited to the perceived unity of the West Ohio Conference of the four participant groups: members of the Unity Task Force, members of

the West Ohio Conference Extended Cabinet, the West Ohio Conference lay and clergy delegates and alternates to the 2008 and 2012 general and jurisdictional conferences, and the resident bishop. The data, therefore, cannot be generalized to any impact the Unity Task Force may have had on the sense of unity in the general population of membership or in local churches within the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Another limiting factor included the number of delegates who participated in the unity survey, only twenty-nine out of eighty-four. I had hoped for a larger and more representative sample. Twenty-nine is a very small sample (1.35 percent) of the 2,142 lay and clergy members who attended annual conference in 2012. While the small number limits the generalizability of the data to all age groups (no youth, two persons age 18-30, and three persons age 31-45 completed the survey) or ethnic groups (only three African-Americans and the rest, twenty-six, Caucasian), the overall survey data paralleled the data from the other groups in the study, thus giving validity to the results.

The focus-group interviews of the Unity Task Force and Extended Cabinet provided valuable data that shaped the questions on the unity survey, and the open-ended questions on the survey provided valuable information that clarified and supported the quantitative data. If I conducted the research again, I would add another question or two to the unity survey, asking participants to quantify the impact the significant events had on the sense of unity in the conference.

Unexpected Observations

Interestingly, communication appeared as a sign of both unity and disunity prior to and after the formation of the Unity Task Force. Participants named meaningful dialogue as a minor theme of unity prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force and

more civil communication as a minor theme after. For signs of disunity, participants named hate-filled communication as a major theme prior to the Unity Task Force and the lack of communication or communication being “shut down” as a major theme after the formation of the Unity Task Force. Despite the efforts to have civil conversations about the issues, many believed the efforts actually suppressed open, honest communication, especially on divisive issues.

I was surprised the data did not reveal any statistically significant differences based on theological identity or conference member status (clergy or laity). The raw data comparing the various theological preferences showed some very small differences, but they were not statistically significant. If the sample size was larger and the trends continued, some differences might have been statistically significant.

Recommendations

Many groups, churches, conferences, people within denominations, and people of different denominations struggle to find unity in the midst of their great diversity. This research serves as a great reminder that the best thing they can do to maintain and build the unity to which Christ calls them is to help believers grow in their relationships with Christ and each other. As they grow in their relationships, Christ will enable them to overcome at least some of their divisions and focus on their common mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As believers find unity with Christ and with each other, they will live out their mission in such a way that those outside the body of Christ will see the unity and love the diverse believers have for one another, and they will be drawn to the Christ who unites them.

Diverse groups of believers, such as the West Ohio Conference, would benefit from bringing together diverse groups of people at a grass-roots level for the sole purpose of helping people getting to know each other as more than theological labels and for building relationships with each other. Learning to use good and civil communication tools, such as those introduced by the Unity Task Force, might provide the initial guidelines and boundaries for the beginnings of their conversations that will help really listen and get to know each other. Some groups that might benefit from these conversations and relationship-building opportunities include clergy clusters, delegations to general and jurisdictional conferences, emerging leaders, such as those in the candidacy process to become pastors, and groups within a congregation.

While Christ calls believers to unity, unity must not become an idol. Unity is not the ultimate goal; Christlikeness is. As people grow in their relationship with Christ, Christ makes them one and more Christlike. When people mistake unity as the ultimate goal, they may confuse uniformity or equal representation for unity, or they may suppress open and honest discussion and debate at the risk of disagreement. All Christians will not agree on everything, but all Christians can and should have the mind of Christ, showing to others the same sacrificial, self-giving, and other-centered love that Christ does.

This research concurs with Bishop Willimon's statement that unity groups may not be the answer to try to bring unity when deep divisions exist:

In a way, maybe we shouldn't want unity as much as communion despite our differences. Also, sometimes, if we love unity too much, we merely suppress our differences and ignore our conflicts in order to have unity.... Our unity, our only unity is in Christ. He has an ability to hold lots of different sorts of people together.

As believers seek communion with Christ, Christ will bring communion and unity among believers. Churches and conferences of all denominations may apply the principles learned from this study about how Christians can work together to build relationships with Christ and each other that will, by Christ's grace, build unity. When they do, the world will see the difference and be drawn to the Christ in them, thus fulfilling Christ's prayer for Christians to be one so that the world may know and become one with him.

Postscript

As I have studied biblical unity and conducted the research for this project, Christ has reminded me repeatedly that life is all about living in a trinity of relationships—living in loving union with Christ, with each other, and then being one in ministry to the world. Since God has wired me as a task-oriented person, this great call to focus on relationships is a challenge for me. The goal of ministry is not to develop programs, accomplish goals, or grow a congregation or a conference; the goal of ministry is to help people find and grow in their relationship with Christ and with others. As people grow in their relationship with Christ and with others, accomplished goals and growing congregations will naturally result. Therefore, I believe all facets of ministry should be filtered through the lens of relationships. If a project or ministry does not help people grow in at least one of their trinity of relationships, then it should be discarded or revamped so it will do so.

This study also calls me intentionally to build relationships with people different from me, especially those on the opposite side of the great theological divide. I always strive to treat people with love and respect, but I should be more strategic and intentional about building relationships with them. My goal in life and ministry always has been to

be who Christ created and called me to be for the sake of helping others know Christ and
be all Christ created and called them to be.

APPENDIX A
REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY
AND THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

WHEREAS, The United Methodist Church has struggled for many years over the issue of homosexuality, and

WHEREAS, the General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns (GCCUIC) remains committed to pursuing unity within the church as a gift and calling of God, and

WHEREAS, the 2000 General Conference directed the GCCUIC to lead the church in dialogue on issues related to homosexuality and the unity of the church (Resolution Number 29, Book of Resolutions 2000, page 134), and

WHEREAS, the 2000 General Conference directed the GCCUIC to report on this work within The United Methodist Church; and

WHEREAS, the GCCUIC has been privileged to listen to the hopes, fears, concerns, and suggestions of hundreds of persons across The United Methodist Church, and

WHEREAS, the GCCUIC has worked to create open, grace-filled spaces for persons with contending viewpoints to learn to know each other authentically, to explore divergent understandings through prayerful and civil dialogue, and whenever possible, to experience healing and reconciliation, and has developed models that promote this kind of grace-filled and civil dialogue, and

WHEREAS, the GCCUIC has employed these models to engage the Council of Bishops, the General Council on Ministries, representatives of the five national racial/ethnic caucuses of The United Methodist Church, as well as youth and young adults in

productive conversations; and has developed resources for dialogue in local churches, districts, and annual conferences, and

WHEREAS, the GCCUIC was directed by the 2000 General Conference to forgo any advocacy on this issue at the 2004 General Conference related to the position or language of The Book of Discipline,

Therefore, be it resolved, that the 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church receives the report of the Task Force on Homosexuality and the Unity of the Church of the GCCUIC and commends the report to the whole Church, and

Be it further resolved, that the 2004 General Conference encourages further dialogue throughout The United Methodist Church designed with worship at the center to lead to greater understanding, love, and care for each other, and with the hope that our struggles with these concerns will take a more civil character to the benefit of us all.

ADOPTED 2004

RESOLUTION #35, 2004 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS

Social Principles, ¶ 161F.

Source: “Report of the Task Force on Homosexuality and the Unity of the Church”

APPENDIX B

WEST OHIO CONFERENCE'S RESOLUTION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

WHEREAS the 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church overwhelmingly passed the following Resolution on the Unity of the Church:

"As United Methodists we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for our common mission of making disciples throughout the world"

WHEREAS the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians urges:

"I have a serious concern to bring up with you, my friends, using the authority of Jesus, our Master. I'll put it as urgently as I can: You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common." (1 Corinthians 1:10, *The Message*)

WHEREAS Paul in his later letter to the Ephesians writes:

I therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-5 New Revised Standard Version)

WHEREAS our Discipline (paragraph 105, page 51) states that:

"John Wesley followed a time tested approach: 'In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.'"

WHEREAS our West Ohio Annual Conference mirrors the theological diversity of the United Methodist Church and the accompanying divisions over scripture and revelation, our social principles, and how to live out our faith and

covenant through the discipline.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that we, the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, strongly affirm the aforementioned General Conference Resolution on Christian Unity.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we will support, on a local church, district and conference level, our Bishop's effort in 2004-2008 to lead us into a season of theological reflection, diligent biblical study, and broad and honest conversation and discernment about what constitutes authentic unity. To that end, we encourage the Bishop to work with the Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns and others in our annual conference to develop a process of reflection, study, conversation, and discernment.

BE IT LIKEWISE RESOLVED that we commit ourselves in this new quadrennium to "cultivating a life in common" as we live out our faith and covenant in the West Ohio Conference.

Respectfully submitted,

The West Ohio Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns

Source: West Ohio Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns

APPENDIX C

TIMELINE OF EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITY TASK FORCE AND WEST OHIO CONFERENCE

2004 to 2011

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|--------------|---|
| June 2004 | The West Ohio Conference (WOC) approved a “Resolution on Christian Unity” to support the bishop’s leadership in 2004-2008 to lead the West Ohio Conference (WOC) “into a season of theological reflection, diligent biblical study, and broad and honest conversation and discernment about what constitutes authentic unity” and to work with people in the WOC “to develop a process of reflection, study, conversation, and discernment” (see Appendix B). |
| July 2005 | Unity Task Force (UTF) formed and new members spent time building relationships and community. |
| Sept. 2005 | UTF members reviewed and covenanted to practice the principles of agreeing and disagreeing in love (see Appendix D). |
| 26 Feb. 2006 | UTF hosted a gathering of forty-seven leaders within the West Ohio Conference (not counting UTF members) who represented various caucus groups (Good News, Evangelical Fellowship of West Ohio, Confessing Movement, Black Methodist for Church Renewal, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Open Table, Town and Rural Ministries, Clergy Women’s Caucus, Hispanic and Asian Ministries), “opinion-makers, persons of influence, and those who had led behind the scenes” (Unity Task Force, Meeting Minutes 20 Oct. 2005) to (1) review, amend, and covenant to practice the proposed ground rules for the meeting, and (2) “consider and amend” the UTF’s proposed legislation to guide the WOC annual conference session in their conduct of the election of delegates to the 2008 general and jurisdictional conferences so they are conducted in a spirit of civility and Christian love (Ough, Letter 23 Jan. 2006). |
| May 2006 | Representatives of the UTF presented to each the district’s pre-conference briefings a document outlining agreeing and disagreeing in love and the proposed legislation to guide the 2007 election process for 2008 general and jurisdictional conference delegates. |
| June 2006 | UTF presented and invited all the members of the WOC at annual conference to practice the principles of “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love.” |

- 14 June 2006 The WOC annual conference amended and approved Resolution #7, "Election of Delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences" (see Appendix F).
- June 2006 Bishop Ough appointed and the WOC annual conference affirmed the selection of the Elections Team to guide the newly approved 2007 election process.
- 19 Sept. 2006 UTF (along with members from the East Ohio Conference and members of the Board of General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns) planned and organized a Christology Conference: "Who Do You Say that I Am?"
- Jan.-Feb. 2007 UTF continued community-building exercises within the UTF
- 5 June 2007 UTF hosted the leadership forum, "A Conversation about Our Understandings of Homosexuality," to provide an opportunity for leaders to reflect and converse about people's differing views of homosexuality and the church.
- June 2007 WOC implemented the previously approved election process for the 2008 general and jurisdictional conference delegates.
- 12 Oct. 2007 UTF (in conjunction with the West Ohio Conference Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns) facilitated "Will You Hear Me Now? A Day of Christian Conversation about Homosexuality and the Church."
- Jan. 2008 The 2008 WOC General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates and alternates did not endorse the only WOC Episcopal candidate.
- Mar. 2008 UTF wrote and encouraged the WOC to pray a "Prayer for the Delegates to General Conference 2008."
- April-May 2008 The WOC delegates participated in general conference.
- July 2008 Bishop Ough was appointed to serve the WOC for a third quadrennium.
- 14 Nov. 2008 UTF, in cooperation with Connectional Ministries, organized and facilitated a unity gathering and dialogue to "(1) create an environment for open-ended conversation with an expanded group beyond the Unity Task Force, (2) allow ministry focus groups and caucuses with different goals and values to come together in a non-legislative setting to develop a deeper understanding of other organizations and constituencies in the Conference, and (3) acknowledge and affirm the role caucuses and ministry focus groups play in the life of the Conference" (Ough, Letter 23

Oct. 2008). All participants asked to follow “Respectful Communication Guidelines.”

- 11 May 2009 UTF and Connectional Ministries hosted a “Gathering of Leaders” for “an honest conversation about unity” (Unity Task Force, Meeting Minutes 11 May 2009) and to continue the discussion begun at the 14 Nov. 2008 meeting.

- Jan. 2010 UTF welcomed new members

- June 2010 UTF drafted and the WOC Annual Conference voted to adopt “Proposing a Way to Move Forward” (see Appendix L), a procedure for the WOC to follow regarding the nomination of an openly gay man as the Conference CFO.

- June 2010 The WOC elected an openly gay man as CFO. The close vote gave evidence to the intense division within the conference and resulted in further discontent and alienation of those who considered themselves more conservative. This discontent and alienation resulted in twenty-five churches leaving the denomination, other churches and members ready to leave, and 110 churches choosing to withhold all or partial apportionments in protest. At the same time, seven churches increased apportionment giving to show their support of the vote (Statistics as of 10 Nov. 2011; Extended Cabinet Meeting).

- 16 Oct. 2010 UTF (along with Ted Campbell and presenters for the day) coordinated and facilitated the seminar “Covenant in the Midst of Conflict.”

APPENDIX D

AGREEING AND DISAGREEING IN LOVE

“Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph.4:3),
as both individual members and the body of Christ, we pledge that we shall:

In Thought

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Accept conflict | 1. Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our life in the church. Romans 14:1-8, 10-12, 17-19; 15:1-7 |
| Affirm hope | 2. Affirm that as God walks with us in conflict, we can work through to growth. Ephesians 4:15-16 |
| Commit to prayer | 3. Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory solution (no prayers for my success or for the other to change but to find a joint way). James 5:16 |

In Action

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Go to the other ... | 4. Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoid behind-the-back criticism.* Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20 |
| ... In the spirit of humility | 5. Go in gentleness, patience and humility. Place the problem between us at neither doorstep and own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out the others'. Galatians 6:1-5 |
| Be quick to listen | 6. Listen carefully, summarize and check out what is heard before responding. Seek as much to understand as to be understood. James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13 |
| Be slow to judge | 7. Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats and act in a nondefensive, nonreactive way. Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26 |
| Be willing to negotiate | 8. Work through the disagreements constructively. Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11 |

- Identify issues, interests, and needs of both (rather than take positions).
- Generate a variety of options for meeting both parties' needs (rather than defending one's own way).
- Evaluate options by how they meet the needs and satisfy the interests of all sides (not one side's values).
- Collaborate in working out a joint solution (so both sides gain, both grow and win).
- Cooperate with the emerging agreement (accept the possible, not demand your ideal).
- Reward each other for each step forward, toward agreement (celebrate mutuality).

In Life

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Be steadfast in love | 9. Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual solution; be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ; be steadfast in love. Colossians 3:12-15 |
| Be open to mediation | 10. Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use those with gifts and training in mediation in the larger church. Philippians 4:1-3 |
| Trust the community | <p>11. We will trust the community and if we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation or from the broader church. Acts 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In one-to-one or small group disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate. ○ In congregational, conference district or denominational disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate or implementing constitutional decision-making processes, insuring that they are done in the spirit of these guidelines, and abiding by whatever decision is made. |
| Be the Body of Christ | 12. Believe in and rely on the solidarity of the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather |

than resort to the courts of law. 1 Corinthians 6:1-6

**Go directly if you are European-North American; in other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between. Mennonite Church USA (adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church Triannual Session and Mennonite Church General Assembly, Wichita, KS July 1995)*

Christians are not immune to conflict. We face it in our homes and churches, in our neighborhoods and work places. Wherever we interact with other people, we experience conflict.

Too often conflict becomes destructive, because we try to avoid it, or because we don't know how to face it well. But we can make it an opportunity to grow, to become more faithful to Jesus, to model Christ-like love for one another.

To work constructively with conflict, we need skills. "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" outlines approaches to conflict that will help us live out our calling to be Christian peacemakers.

Biblical Foundation

The Bible guides us to seek reconciliation when we disagree. Scripture teaches us that conflict can be an arena for God's revelation.

- Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. Through Christ we are reconciled to God, who gives us the ministry of reconciliation. Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
- Reconciliation with others in the church is a prelude to genuine worship. Matthew 5:23-24
- Jesus describes a process for addressing conflict and restoring relationships in the church. Matthew 18:15-22
- Groups in the early church came together to talk about their differences, to seek the Spirit's leading as they worked for consensus. Acts 6:1-6; Acts 15:1-3
- The church needs each person's gifts and perspectives; no one has a corner on truth. 1 Corinthians 12-14
- God's chosen ones are to bear with one another, to forgive each other and to clothe themselves "with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Colossians 3:12-17
- We are to grow in unity and maturity by speaking the truth in love. Ephesians 4:1-16
- God calls us to act and speak with respect for each other despite differences of culture or conviction. Romans 14:1-7; James 1:19; John 7:51; Ephesians 4:25-32; Matthew 7:1-5; 1 Peter 3: 8, 16

- God's people do not seek the absence of conflict but the presence of shalom, a peace based on justice. Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 58; Matthew 23:23-24; Luke 4:18-19

Adopting the Guidelines

We encourage congregations, area conferences, church boards and agencies to adopt the guidelines for agreeing and disagreeing in love, and to use them. The process you use to consider adopting the guidelines can itself be a model for working through differences together.

Design a process to study the guidelines and decide whether to adopt them. Your written process design could include these pieces:

- A. Define the issue: Should our group adopt these guidelines?
- B. Identify goals: To enhance our commitment and ability to deal constructively with conflict. (Add your goals.)
- C. Clarify steps and timeline:
 1. Approve the process design. The appropriate decision-making body acts to do this.
 2. Study the guidelines and the biblical foundations.
 - a. Offer a Sunday school class on conflict resolution skills for congregations.
 - b. Invite an outside resource person to present a Saturday workshop on the topic.
 - c. Encourage committees and small groups to study the guidelines
 3. Talk together about using the guidelines.
 - a. Discuss ways to use the guidelines in your context.
 - b. Integrate the guidelines into constitutions, bylaws, personnel policies.
 - c. Note concerns that arise and work to resolve them.
 4. Implement the decision rule (see below).
- D. State the decision rule: Identify who will make the decision, and how it will be made.

Using the Guidelines

After your group has adopted the guidelines, you can:

- Display the "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" poster in rooms where committees meet.
- Include training on the guidelines in new member classes or orientation sessions.
- Use reconciliation and conflict resolution as a focus for worship from time to time.

- Include articles in your newsletter about the guidelines and your experience with them.
- Appoint a process observer for your meetings, to monitor your group's use of the guidelines.
- Every year evaluate how your group is working with conflict.

Several Cautions

The guidelines should not be used as a substitute for the proper exercise of authority. When laws have been broken or people abused, mediation would only be appropriate at later stages, when offenders have taken responsibility for their actions and victims are requesting face-to-face meetings as a step toward their own healing.

The guidelines may inform disciplinary or grievance procedures, but they are not intended to be a substitute for such procedures. In crosscultural settings, the guidelines should be adapted to fit the context.

Some Basic Principles

In interpersonal and group conflicts, people can take many of the steps identified in the guidelines without the help of an impartial third party. But when conflict escalates and the principal parties cannot resolve it by negotiating together, they should seek outside help.

In mediation, disputing parties come to their own agreement with the assistance of an objective third party. Those serving as mediators should be trained; attempting to mediate a dispute without having the necessary skills can make matters worse. Trained mediators can help people come to agreement on issues and also aid in healing broken relationships.

If mediation fails to resolve a dispute, arbitration could be sought. The disputing parties would agree in advance to abide by whatever decision the arbitrators make. The arbitrators listen to each party's case, consult with each other, and agree on a win-win decision that attempts to address the interests of all the parties.

Information

For more information, contact:

Mennonite Church USA—Peace Advocate; Peace@MennoniteUSA.org;
Toll-free 866-866-2872; www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace

Lombard Mennonite Peace Center—101 W. 22nd Street, Suite 206, Lombard, IL 60148; 630-627-0507; Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org
www.LMPeaceCenter.org

Mennonite Conciliation Service—21 South 12th St., PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; 717-859-3889; mcs@mccus.org;
www.mcc.org/us/peaceandjustice/mcs.html

To order additional copies, contact:

Third Way Media—1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2497;
LoisH@MennoMedia.org; 1-800-999-3534

To see additional resources:
www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace

Source: “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love.”

APPENDIX E

GUIDELINES FOR HOLY CONFERENCING

Guidelines for Holy Conferencing—What God Expects of Us

Colossians 3:12-16a, 17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, ... and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1. Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.
2. As you patiently listen and observe the behavior of others, be open to the possibility that God can change the views of any or all parties in the discussion.
3. Listen patiently before formulating responses.
4. Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
5. Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise dialogue may be inhibited.
6. Accurately reflect the views of others when speaking. This is especially important when you disagree with that position.
7. Avoid using inflammatory words, derogatory names, or an excited and angry voice.

8. Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.
9. Make use of facilitators and mediators.
10. Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God—not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.

We believe Christians can discuss important issues without the acrimonious debate and parliamentary maneuvering that can divide a group into contending factions. We see too many examples of that in secular society. We believe the Holy Spirit leads in all things, especially as we make decisions. We want to avoid making decisions in a fashion that leaves some feeling like winners and others like losers. We can change the world through honest conversation on matters about which we are passionate.

We offer our thanks to the participants at The Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly, sponsored by the Division on Ministries with Young People, through the General Board of Discipleship, held in January, 2007 in Johannesburg, South Africa, for inspiring the framework of these guidelines. They adopted similar guidelines for Christian Conferencing at the convocation. This work is based on guidelines for "Holy Conferencing" that emerged from the United Methodist "Dialogue on Theological Diversity" in February 1998.

Source: Bray.

APPENDIX F**WEST OHIO CONFERENCE 2006 RESOLUTION #7:****“ELECTION OF DELEGATES TO
GENERAL AND JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCES”**

WE VALUE Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and model for living. Therefore, we covenant together to conduct ourselves at all times as persons who seek first Jesus Christ and his righteousness.

1. WE VALUE each person as created in God’s image and therefore of inestimable worth. Therefore, we covenant together to:

- State our own questions and convictions clearly and honestly while respecting the opinion and discernment of each person as we seek to listen to one another as an avenue of discerning God’s direction individually and corporately.
- Look beyond labels sometimes used to characterize those offering themselves for election and those participating in the election process in order to hear and understand the hopes, visions, concerns, convictions, and insights of one another.
- Abstain from personal attacks on others offering themselves for election, promoting election of candidates or seeking to prayerfully discern how to cast their vote.
- Advocate for our own understandings, but refrain from speaking and writing that unfairly characterizes the positions of others.
- Refrain from using expressions of personal offense as a means of restricting or cutting off opinions with which we disagree.
- Avoid needlessly inflammatory language.

- Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God, and not by the flaws we believe we discover in their thinking or actions.
- Offer withdrawal speeches that incarnate these values.

2. As part of the body of Jesus Christ, WE VALUE our Wesleyan heritage and The United Methodist Church which, although fallible, is nonetheless called to engage in processes of discernment and decision making that promotes faithfulness to God's will and seeks unity in the church. Therefore, we covenant together to work toward election processes that promote unity that comes from respectful engagement of differing understandings and opinions.

3. We value election of General and Jurisdictional delegates as a process of corporate discernment of God's will. We reject the notion that elections are inherently "evil" or "unspiritual." Therefore, we covenant together to:

Work toward the perfection of a process that is broadly perceived as fair and open, provides for all who desire the opportunity to be fairly considered for election based upon their gifts and grace and spiritual maturity, gifts and qualifications for the position sought, as well as their convictions and understandings.

- a. Hold to the highest standards of integrity in the distribution of election materials and the development of efforts including truthful representation of our own positions and qualifications, refraining from misrepresentation of the positions and qualifications of others, distributing only materials that are clearly identified as to their source, and avoidance of negative campaigning.
- b. Pursue a pace in balloting that allows full distribution of the results of each ballot and time for prayerful discernment.

- c. Distribute full printed information on the results of each ballot (including persons elected and vote totals) prior to taking the next ballot.
- d. Provide a balanced means of placing in the hands of all members of the conference recommendations of various groups and parties regarding the election of delegates during the progress of the election.
- e. Refrain from actions prior to and on the floor of the annual conference intended to needlessly inflame emotion or manipulate, rather than influence.

5. Recognizing that not all of our brothers and sisters have been present at the table in the past, WE VALUE an elective process that honors diversity of race, color, national origin, status and economic condition as noted in Par. 4, Article IV of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church,¹ as well as age, gender, and physical disability as reflected within the boundaries of the West Ohio Conference.

6. WE VALUE an elective process and delegation that honors and encourages broad and honest theological discourse and provides fair and civil procedures for elections.

7. WE VALUE the election of capable leaders from throughout the conference who will effectively and faithfully engage the issues, needs, and concerns of Jesus Christ and the United Methodist Church as we make disciples and seek the transformation of the world. Therefore, we covenant together to be intentional in developing avenues to explore and discover the qualifications and convictions of persons seeking election towards electing a diverse and representative delegation.

PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS:

We recommend—

1. That a printed tally of each ballot be completed and distributed to delegates prior to taking the next ballot. The written tally shall include:
 - The name and number of the candidate
 - The vote total of each person receiving votes (subject to rules established or amended from time to time by the body);
 - The gender, racial-ethnic identity and age category (Under 18; 18-30; 31-45; 46-60; Over 60) of each person receiving votes.
 - The order (elder or deacon) of each clergy candidate.
 - A report of the gender, racial-ethnic, age category, and order composition of the delegation elected to that point in time.
2. Persons wishing to withdraw from consideration for election shall notify the Chair (Bishop) of their desire. The Chair (Bishop) shall report the withdrawal to the Conference or the person shall be recognized to offer a public withdrawal.
3. That the West Ohio Annual Conference Treasurer's Office provide CDs to the Conference Election Team with the mailing information of all clergy and lay members of the annual conference. The Conference Elections Team shall distribute the CDs to any person offering himself/herself for election or group seeking to present recommendations regarding elections. Any member of the annual conference or of the churches of the West Ohio Conference upon endorsement by their local church council or an official or unofficial group within the annual conference shall be eligible to receive a copy of the CD. Upon review by the Conference Elections Team, any individual or group may, at

their expense, mail election materials to members of the conference. All individuals and groups participating in the elective process will be asked to covenant to distribute materials only through this process. Any person or group not abiding by this process will be noted at Annual Conference.

4. That a Conference Elections Team be established to guide the elective process.

- The Conference Elections Team shall be composed of a balanced and diverse group of eight persons who hold differing viewpoints and shall be appointed by the Bishop and confirmed by the Annual Conference.
- The Conference Elections team shall select their leadership.
- Members of the Conference Elections Team must agree not to offer themselves for or accept election as delegates to General or Jurisdictional Conference while serving on the Team.
- The Conference Elections Team shall implement, oversee, monitor, report and provide for the processes outlined in this document and address any election related issues not covered by this document.
- The Conference Statistician *ex-officio* with voice but no vote.

5. That the Annual Conference continue to prepare and distribute a composite resource with basic information on all persons seeking election.

6. That a Compilation of Recommended Candidate Lists be used as an equitable means of distributing one document that contains the updated candidate recommendations (“slate updates”) of official and unofficial conference groups during the process of balloting at annual conference.

- Eligible official and unofficial groups working at the annual conference may submit their recommendations to the Conference Elections Team to be included in the Compilation of Recommended Candidate Lists. The self-description of each group shall be included with each listing of recommendations.
- The Compilation of Recommended Candidate Lists shall be distributed by the ushers within the bar of the Conference. All members of the annual conference shall be eligible to receive them.
- The Compilation of Recommended Candidate Lists shall be distributed at a minimum one time daily during the elective process, as well as prior to the first ballot for Jurisdictional Conference delegates. The Conference Elections Team shall consult with participating official and or unofficial groups in determining the frequency and timing of distribution.
- At the conclusion of the elective process the Conference Elections Team will calculate the cost of producing the Compilation of Recommended Candidate Lists. Groups making use of this process shall underwrite the cost on an equitable basis as determined by the Conference Elections Team.
- All official or unofficial groups participating in the election process will be asked to covenant to distribute updated recommendations only through this process.

Those who do not abide by this process will be noted at the Annual Conference.

7. That following the first ballot, the Conference agenda will provide an opportunity for Conference members to have conversations with the top 35 clergy candidates and the top 35 laity candidates from the second ballot. Further, that a similar time for conversation with the top 25 clergy candidates and the top 25 laity candidates be placed in the agenda,

if needed and directed by the body, prior to balloting for the Jurisdictional Conference delegates.

¹ 4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church—The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status,⁴ or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.⁵ In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member of any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.⁶

Respectfully submitted,

The Unity Task Force:

Grayson Atha

Benis Lutz

Henry Stringer

Gloria Brooks

Mebane McMahon

Patricia Wagner

Gene Brundidge

David Meredith

Alice Wolfe

Derik Hines

Mildred Oglesby

Bishop Bruce Ough

Nancy Kuss

Greg Stover

Source: Unity Task Force, “Election of Delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences.”

APPENDIX G

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

R = take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use **Empathetic** listening

S = be **Sensitive** to differences in communication styles

P = **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak

E = **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep **Confidentiality**

T = **Trust** ambiguity, because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

Source: “Respectful Communication Guidelines.”

APPENDIX H

UNITY SURVEY

INTRODUCTION:

People understand unity to mean different things. For this study, I am focusing on the biblical understanding of unity, as described below:

Unity: Jesus Christ calls His disciples to be unified, to be “one” with Him and each other.

This unity can be expressed in three ways:

1. Soteriological Unity: Persons experience soteriological or spiritual unity with Christ when they become one with Christ. Thus, as they become one with Christ, they should become more like Christ and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.
2. Functional Unity: When persons become one with Christ, they also become one with the body of Christ (fellow believers and followers of Christ) and experience a practical or functional unity as they relate to each other and use their diverse gifts to build up the body of Christ and each other. For believers to experience unity with each other, they do not necessarily have to agree on everything. Paul and Peter disagreed on some things, but they agreed on the essentials. Though this functional unity among believers is imperfect, their oneness with each other should result in loving, Christlike behavior toward other believers.
3. Missional Unity: When believers become one with Christ and one each other within the body of Christ, they become united in mission to reach those outside the body of Christ.

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact the Unity Task Force has had on the sense of unity of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.

QUESTIONS:

Please type in your answer or click on the response that best indicates how much you agree with each item.

1. How strong is the sense of unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference now?

*1 = None; 2 = Little; 3 = Moderate; 4 = Strong; 5 = Very Strong;
DK = Don't Know*

2. How strong is the sense of disunity in the West Ohio Annual Conference now?

*1 = None; 2 = Little; 3 = Moderate; 4 = Strong; 5 = Very Strong;
DK = Don't Know*

3. How strong was the sense of unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force in 2005?

*1 = None; 2 = Little; 3 = Moderate; 4 = Strong; 5 = Very Strong;
DK = Don't Know*

4. How strong was the sense of disunity in the West Ohio Annual Conference prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force in 2005?

*1 = None; 2 = Little; 3 = Moderate; 4 = Strong; 5 = Very Strong;
DK = Don't Know*

5. To the best of your memory, what were signs of disunity in the West Ohio Annual Conference prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force in 2005? Please give examples or evidence of these signs.

(Provide space for qualitative answer.)

6. To the best of your memory, what were signs of unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference (given the biblical understanding described above) prior to the formation of the Unity Task Force in 2005? Please give examples or evidence of these signs.

(Provide space for qualitative answer.)

7. What are signs of unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference now (given the biblical understanding described above)? Please give examples or evidence of these signs.

(Provide space for qualitative answer.)

8. What are signs of disunity in the West Ohio Annual Conference now? Please give examples or evidence of these signs.

(Provide space for qualitative answer.)

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

9. The unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference has increased since the Unity Task Force began its work in 2005.

*1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree;
5 = Strongly Agree; DK = Don't Know*

10. If there has been an increase in unity in the West Ohio Conference, it can be attributed to the work of the Unity Task Force.

*1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree;
5 = Strongly Agree; DK = Don't Know*

11. Factors other than the Unity Task Force have caused an increase in the sense of unity of the West Ohio Conference since 2005.

*1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree;
5 = Strongly Agree; DK = Don't Know*

12. If factors other than the Unity Task Force have contributed to an increase in the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference since 2005, please list them.

(Provide space for qualitative answer.)

13. Have significant events affected or influenced the perceived unity within the West Ohio Conference? If so, what were those significant events and how did they affect it?

(Provide space for qualitative answer.)

14. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people in the West Ohio Conference exhibit an *increase in the fruit of the Spirit* ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," Gal 5:22-23).

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

15. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people in the West Ohio Conference exhibit *more humility and/or selflessness*.

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree; DK = Don't Know

16. The Unity Task Force has not affected West Ohio Conference members' *devotion to Jesus Christ as their Lord*.

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree; DK = Don't Know

17. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have not seen people of *differing theological perspectives* in the West Ohio Annual Conference exhibit a *greater sense of community or more collegiality*.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

18. Since the West Ohio Conference adopted the Unity Task Force's proposed legislative changes (June 2006) for how general and jurisdictional conference delegates and alternates are elected, the atmosphere around the *elections has become more civil*.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

19. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people or groups within the West Ohio Conference *show more self-control or self-correction* to avoid inflammatory language in their conversation with or about persons of different theological perspectives.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

20. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen people of *differing theological perspectives* in the West Ohio Conference *engage in more missions together*. (Missions can include but are not limited to mission trips or missional projects or activities sponsored by a local church, district, or the annual conference.)
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know
21. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, I have seen more people of *differing theological perspectives* in the West Ohio Conference *intentionally strive together to live out the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*.
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know
22. Since the formation of the Unity Task Force, the people of the West Ohio Conference have not become more welcoming or hospitable to others who are different from themselves.
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know
23. The Unity Task Force's legislation governing how delegates are elected to general and jurisdictional conference (and then was adopted by the West Ohio Conference in June 2006) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know
24. The Unity Task Force's Christology Conference: "Who Do You Say that I Am?" (Sept. 2006) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know
25. The Unity Task Force's workshop "A Conversation about Our Understandings of Homosexuality" (June 2007) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know
26. The Unity Task Force's workshop "Will You Hear Me Now? A Day of Christian Conversation about Homosexuality and the Church" (Oct. 2007) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.
1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

27. The Unity Task Force's dialogue session "A Unity Gathering and Dialogue for Ministry Focus Groups and Caucuses" (Nov. 2008 and May 2009) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

28. The Unity Task Force's workshop "Covenant in the Midst of Conflict" (Oct. 2010) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

29. In which of the following workshops or dialogue sessions did you participate? Please check all that you attended.

Christology Conference: Who Do You Say that I Am? (Sept. 2006)

A Conversation about Our Understandings of Homosexuality (June 2007)

Will You Hear Me Now? A Day of Christian Conversation about Homosexuality and the Church (Oct. 2007)

A Unity Gathering and Dialogue for Ministry Focus Groups and Caucuses (Nov. 2008 and May 2009)

Covenant in the Midst of Conflict (Oct. 2010)

30. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" (beginning in 2006) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

31. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Holy Conferencing" (beginning in 2007) did not positively impact the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

32. The Unity Task Force's work of introducing and encouraging members of the West Ohio Conference to practice "Respectful Communication Guidelines" (beginning in 2008) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

33. The Unity Task Force has modeled unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

34. The Unity Task Force has not modeled respect for persons with different theological understandings in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

35. The Unity Task Force has modeled civil discourse in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

36. This modeling of the Unity Task Force (in unity, respect, or civil discourse) has positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

37. In 2010, the Unity Task Force proposed legislation ("Proposing a Way Forward") to guide the annual conference in handling the nomination of an openly gay Chief Financial Officer (Conference Treasurer). This legislation that was then adopted by the West Ohio Conference positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

38. The Unity Task Force's work to build and model relationships and community between persons with different theological understandings (among members on the task force and in encouraging members of the annual conference to do the same) positively impacted the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree; DK = Don't Know

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:

39. Gender: *Male/Female*

40. Member Status: *Laity/Clergy*

41. How long have you been in the West Ohio Conference? ____

42. If you are clergy, how long have you been in the ministry? ____

43. Age: ____

44. Marital Status: *Married, Single (never married), Divorced, Widow(er), Other:*

45. Ethnicity: *White/Caucasian, Black/African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Other (please specify):* ____

46. How do you generally identify yourself theologically?

1 = Very Liberal; 2 = More Liberal; 3 = Moderate; 4 = More Conservative; 5 = Very Conservative

47. How do you identify your sexual orientation publicly?

1 = Heterosexual; 2 = Homosexual; 3 = Bisexual; 4 = Transgender; 5 = Other

48. How do you identify your sexual orientation privately?

1 = Heterosexual; 2 = Homosexual; 3 = Bisexual; 4 = Transgender; 5 = Other

49. Conferences that you attended (check all that apply):

2008 General Conference

2008 Jurisdictional Conference

2012 General Conference

2012 Jurisdictional Conference

50. Please indicate the years you have attended the West Ohio Annual Conference at Lakeside (check all that apply):

2004 or before

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

51. Are you or have you been a member of the West Ohio Conference's Unity Task Force?

Yes

No

Thank you for your help and participation in this survey!

APPENDIX I

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: Impact of the Unity Task Force on the Unity of the West Ohio Conference

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewees and Length of Time in the Group:

Describe Project to Participants:

1. The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of the Unity Task Force on the unity of the West Ohio Conference.
2. During our conversation, I will take notes and will make an audio recording of the interview and transcribe it so I have an accurate record of our conversation.
3. After I have transcribed the data, I will assign a letter to each participant so your comments will remain anonymous. Any information I share about our conversation today will not be able to be traced to you.
4. Our interview today will last 45 minutes.

Have interviewees read and sign the consent form.

Turn on and test the audio recorder.

Because people understand unity to mean different things, clarify the biblical unity we are talking about today...

Unity: Jesus Christ calls His disciples to be unified, to be “one” with Him and each other.

This unity can be expressed in four ways:

Soteriological Unity: Persons experience spiritual or soteriological unity with Christ when they become one with Christ. Thus, they should become more like Christ and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Functional Unity: When persons become one with Christ, they also become one with the body of Christ (fellow believers and followers of Christ) and experience

a practical or functional unity as they relate to each other and use their diverse gifts to build up the body of Christ and each other. Though imperfect, their oneness with each other should result in loving, Christlike behavior toward other believers.

Missional Unity: When believers become one with Christ and each other within the body of Christ, they become united in mission to reach those outside the body of Christ.

Given this understanding...

Questions:

1. What impact (if any) do you perceive the Unity Task Force has had on the unity of the West Ohio Conference?
2. What signs or evidence have you seen of increased *soteriological* unity as a result of the Unity Task Force's work?
3. What signs or evidence have you seen of increased *functional* unity as a result of the Unity Task Force's work?
4. What signs or evidence have you seen of increased *missional* unity as a result of the Unity Task Force's work?
5. Have significant events affected or influenced that perceived unity? If so, what were those significant events and how did they affect it?

Prompts:

1. Could you please expand on what you just said?
2. What do you mean by _____?
3. Could you give me an example?

APPENDIX J

EXPERT REVIEWERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR UNITY SURVEY

1. In the introduction, you may want to clarify under functional unity that all believers do not have to agree on everything, if this is the case.
2. Remove unnecessary parentheses.
3. Make prominent key words *prior to* and *now* to help participants see the difference between questions.
4. Ask similar questions about disunity as unity.
5. Make option #3 “Neither Agree or Disagree” or “Neutral.”
6. Split some of the questions into multiple questions to keep them addressing only one question or item.
7. Ask participants to give their age instead of asking for their age in ranges.
8. Include additional qualitative questions to get a fuller picture.
9. Ask participants to indicate which workshops they attended.
10. You might want to ask for sexual orientation in terms of their private and public identity, how long they have been in the conference, how long they have been in the ministry, maybe their political orientation (conservative to liberal), their marital status.
11. Ideally you want multiple questions for each component of unity. Try to have at least two questions, three would be better. Also try to have one question that is stated in negative terms for each area of unity. You may want that in a couple of other places too. People respond differently to negative items than they do to positive items, and it's not always the exact opposite.
12. Remember that folks can answer about three questions per minute. Demographic questions generally are a lot faster. You really only have about 21 questions that require real thought (that's subtracting the question about how many workshops they attended). You could add 9-14 more and still be in a really good range for most folks. That would cause most people to spend about 12-15 minutes with your survey.
13. Give participants an opportunity to receive a summary of the research data if they would like.

APPENDIX K

BISHOP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: Impact of the Unity Task Force on the Unity of the West Ohio Conference

Time of Interview: 8:30 A.M.

Date: August 22, 2012

Place: Via telephone

Interviewer: Alice Wolfe

Interviewee:

- A. Bishop Bruce Ough
- B. Resident bishop of the Ohio West Area for 12 years

Describe Project to Participants:

- 5. The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of the Unity Task Force (UTF) on the unity of the West Ohio Conference (WOC).
- 6. During our conversation today, I will take notes and will make an audio recording of the interview and transcribe it so I have an accurate record of our conversation.
- 7. If I wish to quote you in my dissertation, I will ask your permission first, to make sure I do not misquote you.
- 8. Our interview today will last no more than 45 minutes.

Prior to phone interview, email informed consent to Bishop Ough and get his approval.

Turn on and test the audio recorder.

Because people understand unity to mean different things, I want to clarify the biblical unity about which I am asking:

Unity: Jesus Christ calls His disciples to be unified, to be “one” with Him and each other.

This unity can be expressed in three ways:

Soteriological Unity: Persons experience soteriological or spiritual unity with Christ when they become one with Christ. Thus, they should become more like Christ and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Functional Unity: When persons become one with Christ, they also become one with the body of Christ (fellow believers and followers of Christ) and experience a practical or functional unity as they relate to each other and use their diverse gifts to build up the body of Christ and each other. Though imperfect, their oneness with each other should result in loving, Christlike behavior toward other believers.

Missional Unity: When believers become one with Christ and each other within the body of Christ, they become united in mission to reach those outside the body of Christ.

Given this understanding, I want to ask you the following questions:

1. From your own perspective and not influenced by any of the data from this study: What impact (if any) do you perceive the Unity Task Force had on the unity of the West Ohio Conference?
2. Questions from the survey:
 - a. The unity in the West Ohio Annual Conference has increased since the Unity Task Force began its work in 2005. (Q9)
1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree
 - b. If there has been an increase in unity in the West Ohio Conference, it can be attributed to the work of the Unity Task Force. (Q10)
1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree
 - c. Factors other than the Unity Task Force have caused an increase in the sense of unity of the West Ohio Conference since 2005. (Q11)
1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree
 - d. If factors other than the Unity Task Force have contributed to an increase in the sense of unity in the West Ohio Conference since 2005, please list them. (Q12)
3. Do the results from the Unity Survey surprise you?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. What did you expect?
4. Do the results from the Unity Task Force Interview surprise you?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. What did you expect?

5. Do the results from the Extended Cabinet Interview surprise you?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. What did you expect?
6. Do you have any other comments or observations you wish to make?

Possible Prompts:

1. Could you please expand on what you just said?
2. What do you mean by _____?
3. Could you give me an example?

APPENDIX L

PROPOSING A WAY TO MOVE FORWARD

The Unity Task Force of West Ohio is a body of lay and clergy members of the conference, currently numbering 16, representing a variety of theological viewpoints. The Task Force was created in 2005 to “*cultivate a life in common as we live out our faith and covenant in the West Ohio Conference.*” Since that time we have assisted the Annual Conference in adopting a style of Holy Conferencing based upon the concepts of “*Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love.*” We have recommended procedures for dealing with controversial issues, and we have proposed a process to guide the election of our delegates to Jurisdictional and General Conference. This year Bishop Ough has invited us to again propose a fair process to guide the annual conference in considering a matter of importance to all, in the spirit of Christian Conferencing.

That matter is the nomination and election of a Chief Financial Officer (Conference Treasurer). The Council on Finance and Administration is charged by The Discipline, with the responsibility of nominating a person to fill that role. You may have heard that the nominee is Bill Brownson, a gay United Methodist layperson living in a committed relationship for the last twenty years.

We on the Unity Task Force acknowledge that, like the whole church, we are not of one mind on this subject. There are those who strongly believe that Mr. Brownson’s sexual orientation is not relevant to this decision and discussion. Others strongly believe that Mr. Brownson’s election is not consistent with the Disciplinary statement that “the United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible with Christian teaching.” ¶161(F) of The Social Principles. There are also

those within the task force who are conflicted about their beliefs and are struggling in their own minds and spirits to discern how they will vote.

But, in spite of our differences on this subject, we witness to you that there are points on which we do agree. We offer them to you with the invitation to join us in allowing these shared beliefs to guide the discussion at Annual Conference surrounding the nomination and election of the Chief Financial Officer.

a. The discourse that surrounds this issue should be conducted with civility and an attitude of holy conferencing. (Guidelines for civility are attached at the end of this document.)

b. We all desire to conduct this debate doing the least amount of harm to the persons involved, the church and our mission to make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

c. We will honor the different voices that will speak and the vote that will be taken.

d. While we were not a part of the selection process, we affirm that the responsibility to make the nomination lies with the Council on Finance and Administration, and while we acknowledge that no process is perfect, we will concentrate our debate and conversation on the real issue as we perceive it—that being the sexual orientation/practice of the nominee.

e. We acknowledge that Mr. Brownson possesses the professional qualifications to perform the duties of this position.

f. We believe that we need to deal with this matter in an expeditious manner so we can move on to the other important work of this annual conference.

g. We will commit to pray for all involved and for our conference throughout this discernment process.

In light of this witness to our areas of agreement, we have proposed to the Bishop and the Conference Design Team, that we amend our rules to deal with this matter in ways consistent with the statements above. The Annual Conference will have an opportunity to do this during the Rules committee Report.

In addition

1. You will receive information answering anticipated questions.
2. You will receive a written explanation of the selection process and the work of CFA.
3. You will hear the nomination from CFA.
4. There will be a period of discussion and debate to help provide clarity about the different perspectives in this matter. This discussion period will be somewhat different than you have experienced in the past. Each of the two opposing perspectives (those in favor of Mr. Brownson's election and those opposed) will be given a maximum of fifteen minutes to explain and debate the nomination. The Unity Task Force has asked two persons [one who is in support of the nomination and one who is opposed] to direct the time allotted to each point of view. Individual speakers will alternate from one perspective and then the other. After each perspective has exhausted their respective fifteen minute periods, there will be an opportunity for a three minute summary by each.
5. After the summary periods are completed, Bishop Ough will lead the Conference in prayer and we will move immediately to a written secret ballot.

It is our hope that God's Holy Spirit will be at work among us so that we can deal with this issue while maintaining the "*unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*"

Source: Unity Task Force, "Proposing a Way to Move Forward."

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